THE CREDIBILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

S. SMITH

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OR,

Thoughts on Modern Rationalism.

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BY

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PREFACE.

THIS little Volume originated in two Lectures lately delivered in the town of Liverpool, and which were designed to meet in a popular form the Rationalistic objections to Christianity, now so common. Having been addressed mainly to commercial men, care was taken to avoid, as much as possible, technical terms and theological subtleties. The writer feels, indeed, that as a man of business himself, he is not entitled to deal with the subject except in a plain and practical way. This way, besides, appears to him best adapted for gaining many to the cause of truth who might otherwise miss the mark. A deep persuasion of this has led to the publication of these remarks.

The first two parts only were delivered as Lectures, the remainder having been added from a feeling that infelicitous modes of teaching religion to the young have not unfrequently given rise to a distaste for religion itself, and hence, by too easy a transition, to doubts of its truth. To protect the rising generation against this source of infidelity, should we not oftener resort to that style of teaching, so elementary, and yet so profound, to which our Saviour Himself has given the weight of His example?

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE present age is one of intense mental activity; the human intellect is incessantly engaged in probing the foundations of all things, human and divine; no received opinion, however sacred, is allowed to remain unquestioned, and every weak joint in the armour of truth is the mark for a thousand arrows.

That most precious of all gifts to humanity—the Christian religion—stands in the forefront of the battle; around it rages a violent storm of controversy, the most powerful artillery of the human mind assails it on every vulnerable point; whether

on the side of historical criticism, physical science, or psychology, it is attacked with consummate skill, and the minds of the faithful are perplexed by the subtle objections of the adversaries. In former ages the anti-Christian controversy was conducted in a coarser fashion. The infidelity of Paine and Voltaire was revolting to spiritual minds, and though it supplied plausible arguments against Christianity to those who were already hostile, it was comparatively innocuous to true believers. A different and more deadly warfare is waged in the present day. An affected admiration of Christ and His teaching is paraded alongside of arguments which would sap His authority, and undermine all reverence for Holy Scripture. A weak, emasculated mixture, called Christianity, is substituted for the sacred utterance of the oracles of God, and mankind are told they may select this or reject that at their fancy, and construct each for himself a theory of religion to which the name of Christ is appended for decency's sake. There are of course endless modifications of the programme. Some schools of theosophists admit more than others. Some revere the person of Christ, and allow that

His teaching may have been true, but hold that we have so imperfect a report of His words, we cannot now obtain a true likeness of the original. Others, more foolhardy, deny that the Master Himself was infallible, and argue that His sayings may be criticised like Shakespeare's, and the wheat separated from the chaff by a process of eclecticism. Some base their arguments mainly on the corruptness of the sacred text; others on the ignorance of the men who wrote it; some accept the moral teaching, but reject the Supernatural; others find fault even with the morality. It would be wearisome and out of place here to review all the phases of modern unbelief; suffice it to say that their name is legion, and their influence is diffused most widely even among Christian society. It has struck the writer that the vigour of the defence has not been proportioned to the vehemence of the attack, and that more might be urged in favour of a sound and hearty faith in Scriptural Christianity than has yet been done. At all events, the arguments of apologists are too much confined to detached points of the system, and fail to set forth with sufficient emphasis what must always weigh most with the

average of human minds, viz., *the credibility of the Christian revelation as a whole.* We propose to consider in these pages some of the practical aspects of Christianity which recommend it to the unsophisticated human mind, and point out how irreconcilable are many of the modern objections with any plan of revealed religion that could possibly meet the wants of the human race.

CHAPTER II.

THE NECESSITY OF A REVELATION PROVED BY HISTORY.

BUT first we are told by many that a revelation is unnecessary. Has not God—say they—given to all men reason and conscience, and does not His spirit work in all hearts, leading them, if they choose, to the knowledge of His will? Has not the spirit of God spoken through Socrates and Plato, as well as Christ? May not even Buddha and Confucius have heard His sacred voice, and proclaimed to the myriads of the East all that they require to know about their Maker? It is a favourite view with many that God has been speaking in all the ages, and manifesting Himself through prophets equal in authority to, or at least as truly inspired as, Jesus Christ. Those who hold this view of course repudiate the exclusive claims of Christianity; their theory is absolutely incom-

patible with those in numerable sayings of Christ, in which He demands absolute allegiance from all men, and announces that He, and He only, is the Lord of quick and dead, the only begotten Son, the Saviour of the world. Either Christ had as little right to make these claims as Mahomet, or his real teaching has been so lost amid a cloud of tradition that we can only trace a few faint outlines. It is perfectly clear that this view as to the equality of all revelations, or rather the necessity for none, is equivalent to the rejection of the Christian scheme, and the Bible can never maintain its authority among men if it be allowed that the Koran, or the Vedas, or the Golden Book of Mormon, are to divide with it the honour of being the utterance of God.

But what does history say to this theory of an all-prevading and ever-present manifestation of God? Do we find that in all ages and in all climes the spiritual and moral state of mankind has been steadily advancing? Do we find that a higher civilization has been steadily supplanting the lower, and that mankind in all parts of the world have been coming by consentaneous movement to the recognition of those sublime truths that we

have learned from the Bible? All this we would have a right to expect if God had manifested Himself alike to all people, and in all times. We find just the opposite; we find nowhere a steady advance of humanity, except under the influence of Bible teaching and Christian morality.

In support of this assertion, let us first glance at the religions of the East. We find the Hinduism of modern India a vile and corrupting system, incapable of regenerating mankind, and showing no advance, but a retrogression from the comparative purity of the Vedic hymns; we find even now widow-burning and self-torture sanctioned, nay enjoined, by the Brahminical priesthood; and till Christianity had cast its pure rays on that darkened race, there did not arise among the two hundred millions of India a single teacher who could shake the hoary fabric of superstition. Let us turn to China, and we find another effete religion of nature, perhaps not so noisome in its doctrines as Hinduism, but equally incapable of elevating the moral life of the people, or bringing them into anything like a noble and progressive civilization. It is not our intention here to examine the

doctrinal systems of heathendom, but to judge them by their fruits, and so we will not refer to the systems of Buddha and Confucius, the so-called prophets of China, beyond saying that, except some dry moral aphorisms, they supply no food for the spiritual wants of man, and that China has remained some three thousand years or more, that is, as far back as history extends, in the same torpid corrupt state of civilization it now exhibits. Materialism is its faith, the future has no hopes or no terrors, and a practical atheism broods over that vast section of mankind; nor will it ever be dispelled till the light of Christ shines into the dark void. We are not unaware that certain lofty and true utterances are ascribed to Brahma and Buddha and the Sikh Gooroos. Those legendary characters have a nimbus of radiance around them, which attracts the reverential gaze of the student of antiquity, and certainly there have come down to us sayings ascribed to them which indicate truer views of goodness than their modern expounders possess. We do not deny that among heathen philosophers some attained loftier moral heights than others; nay, we admit that in some sense, by

acting up to the light of nature, they received a degree of divine light into their souls. But we hold that neither Brahma, nor Buddha, nor Socrates, nor Plato, received in any proper sense a revelation, that is an authoritative declaration from God of His will respecting men. They received no such revelation as Abraham or Moses, nor are they to be named in the same breath with Him to whom Moses and the Prophets bare witness, and who was either the eternal and only begotten Son of God, or the greatest self-deceiver that ever trod the earth.

But Greece and Rome may be cited as more favourable examples of the abiding manifestation of the Divine presence. Their civilisation once shone with a brilliant light, and still draws the admiring gaze of all cultivated minds. Surely, if ever there was an opportunity for man to do without an outward revelation from God, it was in the heydays of Greece, when such a galaxy of genius adorned the world as has never been surpassed in after-times. If human philosophy could regenerate mankind, surely the country of Plato and Socrates, of Aristotle and Pythagoras, would become a model of virtue. And we do not

deny that the Hellenic soil brought forth some choice fruits. It nourished a heroic patriotism which still, after the lapse of two thousand years, makes the pulse bound at the names of Marathon and Thermopylæ; it covered the land with the most lovely creations of art, and in the wide sphere of intellectual achievement it erected monuments that will last while the world endures. But the genius of Greece lamentably failed when it came to expound the relations of God to man; its force was destructive, but not constructive. It exploded the airy fabrics of primeval nature-worship; it expelled the Dryads from the woods and the Naiads from the fountains; it dethroned the Thunderer, and turned the laugh against gloomy Dis: but it could not construct a new religion; it failed utterly to erect any bulwark against the tide of human passion, and did not stop for a day the decay of Grecian morals. Greek philosophy, at its best, could only speculate darkly on the existence of a God; whether He was one or many, whether He cared for man or no, whether His empire were righteous or unrighteous, were merely questions of dialectics, and had no moral influence on the

mass of the people. All the wisdom of the Greeks, from Thales to Plutarch, discovered less of the Divine character than we find in the Sermon on the Mount, and it effected less for the advancement of piety than a single letter of St. Paul. The decline of Greece is, indeed, one of the saddest pages of history. It bloomed for a brief era with uncommon splendour; but the flower concealed a canker worm, and Hellenic civilization was quenched in a night of Cimmerian darkness, and perished amid vices which the pen of the historian refuses to describe.

The efflorescence of Roman civilization was a weaker copy of that of Greece. The philosophy of Rome was second-hand, and Cicero and Seneca reproduced in a Roman dress the best thoughts of the Academy and the Porch. The most influential school of Roman moralists was that of the Stoics, and amid the wreck and crash of a falling State, they exhibited a sublime equanimity. But their system was cold and hard; it inculcated no love of humanity, far less a love of God. The Stoic enwrapped himself in a shroud of indifference, and, regarding the world with contempt, rejoiced

that he could leave it when he chose by the act of self-destruction. Stoicism, if it be worthy of the name of a religion, was never fitted to go beyond a small school of philosophers, and scarcely even rippled the surface of social life. When Roman literature and philosophy were at their zenith, the morals of the people were decaying. The Augustan era was one of practical Atheism, and if we wish to revert to the purest times of Rome, we must go back to the infancy of the commonwealth, when great questions of State policy were determined by the aspect of a calf's liver or the feeding of the sacred chickens. The early days of Rome were days of genuine belief, but it was belief in childish superstitions. Its later days replaced these superstitions by a refined philosophy, but so far from conducting its people to a purer civilization, the nation became more and more corrupt, till the primal laws of Nature were set at nought and a seething mass of corruption engendered, which the pen of the great Apostle has delineated in that most awful of all recitals of human wickedness—the first chapter of Romans.

If Greek and Roman history teach anything, it

proves that "when men do not like to retain God in their knowledge, they are given over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient." And Rome in the time of Tiberius and Nero reads the same lesson as Paris in the days of the Commune. A godless philosophy can never lay solid foundations for human virtue, and in its attempt to do without God, will only bring forth a monstrous abortion.

In this rapid review of heathen religions we have not thought it needful to refer in detail to all the nations of antiquity. The ancient civilization of Egypt and Assyria shows as few traces of a pure theology as that of India and China. Persia is distinguished by the great name of Zoroaster, around whom has gathered a halo of legend, like the mythical renown of Brahma and Buddha, but all that we can learn of religion from its modern representatives, the Parsees, proves that it has no more power to regenerate mankind, or even to enforce a virtuous life, than the Buddhist or Brahminical systems.

We find then that all the *civilized* nations of antiquity were without a true knowledge of God. Neither the light of nature, nor the light of con-

science conducted them to a religion of holiness. They made no progress in finding out the truth as concerning God's relations to man; their philosophy was powerless to enforce morality, and their civilization contained the fatal germs of decay; so that when we look back on the ancient world, we see wave after wave of humanity breaking, and disappearing on the barren rocks of human speculation. The process is ever the same. Certain crude notions of the Divine are projected from man's consciousness, but they have no foundation in positive truth, and are successively swept away by the tide of time, leaving the race as poor in moral and spiritual intelligence as their remote ancestors.

But do we find that the *savage* races of the globe have succeeded better in the quest after God? Do we find anywhere traces of primeval innocence among them, or purer and holier notions of the Divine character than the civilized nations of antiquity developed? It once was a dream of sophists that man in the savage state was comparatively pure, but the close researches of modern investigators have made it only too plain that the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations

of horrid cruelty. Whether we turn to the Red Indians of North America, the Negroes or Hottentots of Africa, the aboriginal races of the South Sea Islands, or the Esquimaux of Greenland, we come upon no traces of an elevated conception of the Deity, but we meet everywhere with a degraded fetichism, for the most part accompanied by the practice of barbarous rites, and we find that these various races, when they first come in contact with civilized man, are in no degree advanced beyond the place their ancestors filled thousands of years before. It is the extreme of folly to hold that savage man is gradually developing from his own barren soil a truer and holier religion. No one could assert this who was not entirely blinded by his aversion to revealed truth. Whatever arguments may be advanced for the need of a revelation from a review of the civilised or semi-civilised Pagan nations may be urged *a fortiori* from a review of the savage tribes of mankind. The universal testimony of all humanity is that man cannot find out God, and so God must graciously reveal Himself to man, if His character and will are ever to be known at all.

CHAPTER III.

THE BIBLE GOD'S REVELATION PROVED BY HISTORY.

NOW we contend that the Bible, and the Bible only, contains a true revelation of God to man, or rather, we should say, the Bible contains a true record of all the revelations that God has made to man, ending with the crown and flower of them all—the Christian religion. Before we proceed to consider the fitness of God's revelation contained in the Bible, we will pursue the historical argument a little further to show that those nations alone which have received the Bible have developed a pure and Christian civilization. And first let us take the Jews. That nation was chosen by God to be the depositary of the earlier or Mosiac revelation, and at a time when the earth was overspread by idolatry, was selected to be a witness to the oneness of God. Do we find then such a moral

superiority in the Jewish race over the contemporary Gentiles as to afford witness of the greater light they received? We unhesitatingly reply in the affirmative. We find all through the history of the Jews, from Abraham to Christ, a succession of holy men of God who bore testimony to one Supreme and Holy Being, whose will was the law of their lives, and whom they obeyed at the sacrifice of all that men count dear. No efforts of sceptical criticism can dispose of the fact that such men existed; it is childish to suppose that men like Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, were the creation of fancy, like the legendary prophets of heathendom. There is about their lives, as recorded in the Bible, such a perfect naturalness and consistency as utterly rebuts the idea of their being figments of human imagination. Their sins and shortcomings are narrated with the same simplicity as their virtues; there is never the least attempt to gloss over the failings of Old Testament Saints; there is no attempt to palliate sin, there is no attempt to bring down the claims of the Eternal to the level of feeble humanity. God is ever represented as claiming absolute homage, and man as

being favoured in proportion as he yields it. The biographies of Old Testament Saints present a marvellous contrast to the spurious hero-worship of man. Compare the Greek legends of Hercules with the story of Abraham, or the Roman myths about Romulus with the inspired account of Moses, and the stamp of God's truth is seen in forcible contrast to man's invention. Even if it could be proved—which we do not admit—that much historical inaccuracy is incorporated in the Old Testament, it is impossible to deny that a long succession of holy men of God flourished before the coming of Christ, and no other contemporary nation showed anything like it. True, it may be said that the Jewish nation broke out again and again into idolatry, that it imitated the worst vices of surrounding nations, and was almost chronically in a state of rebellion against God, and some may urge that on this account it was none the better of God's revelation. We deny the force of this. The Jews when they sinned did so against a clear revelation of duty, and were often brought back in deep contrition to seek the face of the Most High. They never shut their ears entirely to the voice of

God's prophets, and even when an Ahab was on the throne, there were still seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. We find periods of great national mourning for sin, as in the days of Nehemiah, and we look in vain in all the heathen world for anything analogous to this. When the Gentile nations thought that they had offended some deity, they hastened to appease him by some foul and bloody sacrifice, as Agamemnon, for instance, offered up his daughter Iphigenia to propitiate the winds which delayed the Grecian fleet; but the Jews alone testified that repentance towards God meant a moral reformation. Jewish history indeed presents a continued struggle between the unbending claims of Divine holiness and the stubborn self-seeking heart of man, and reflects, as in a mirror, the eternal conflict that goes on in each struggling soul of man, and is replete with lessons, sometimes allegorical, sometimes typical, often plain and literal, which will never cease to educate even the Christian conscience in some of the deepest concerns of our spiritual nature.

But we readily admit that the Old Testament

dispensation was in some respects a failure. Looking at it from the human standpoint, and judging it by its effect on the nation, it did not succeed in securing a general allegiance to the Most High. An undertone of sadness runs through the whole history of the Jews; in that unique example the Old Testament affords of the history of a nation narrated with exclusive reference to its relation to God, the prevailing note is one of complaint, that the favoured race were so stiff-necked as to bring on themselves repeated chastisement, and towards the close of the volume the darkness deepens, and the nation that rejects God is at last cast off by Him. The Jewish dispensation was a preparation for a higher one, "the law was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ," and when the only begotten Son was ushered into the world the song of angels was "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace and good will to men." The era of types and ordinances had passed, and the full flood of Gospel light had dawned on mankind.

What evidence does the history of Christendom afford to the strength and purity of this new

revelation? We hear by anticipation the chorus of objections which the infidel phalanx have always urged on this score. We are reminded of the blots that disfigure the history of Christian Europe, of the corruptions of so-called Christian societies and the shameful persecuting practices of so-called Christian governments. Nothing is easier than to heap reproaches on Christianity from the inconsistent lives of its professors; nothing is easier than to draw from the history of Europe, for eighteen hundred years, a host of accusations against that holy religion it so often perverted and parodied. It is a stock subject to contrast the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the horrors of the Inquisition, the cruelties of Philip and Alva, the religious wars of Germany, or, to go further back, the waste and folly of the Crusades, with the misdeeds of heathen nations, and to pretend that the world has been none the better for Christianity; but this reasoning can only impose on the superficial, or serve as an excuse to the wilfully blind.

The writers of the New Testament never led us to expect that evil would be rooted out in these ages, or even that it would be prevented assuming

portentous dimensions from time to time; indeed they foretell, with prophetic fire, periods of sad apostasy, when the faith, once delivered to the saints, should be in danger of eclipse, and when outbreaks of human wickedness would overshadow the pure light of Christ; but they lead us to expect, nevertheless, that the candle of true and undefiled religion would never cease to burn, and that in the distant future, probably in a new dispensation, "the knowledge of the Lord would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." We contend that these anticipations have been strictly fulfilled, and that Christianity has done for the world just what its author predicted it would do. It has kept up in all ages in the hearts of many a flame of devotion to Christ; it has supplied a never-ending succession of martyrs, who have testified by their blood that they counted not their lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their course with joy; it has maintained a deadly struggle with all forms of national wickedness, and has often so impressed the conscience of nations that they have voluntarily relinquished great sources of profit and pleasure.

Has not Christianity well nigh extinguished slavery and polygamy in all nations among which it has come? Has it not stigmatised infanticide and prostitution, which were legalized by some of the most advanced nations of antiquity? Has it not slowly and steadily softened the cruel usages of warfare, and is it not gradually creating a current of public opinion which looks upon all war as barbarous and unchristian? There cannot be a doubt that, just as the religion of Christ has penetrated the life of a nation, it has in that degree purified its laws, and produced a higher civilization; and we maintain that those nations at the present day, in which the Bible is most revered, are exactly those in which the happiness and welfare of mankind have attained their maximum.

We hold that those dark crimes which disfigured the middle ages were the result, not of Christianity, but of the suppression of its divine utterance. It was when a usurping priesthood proscribed the use of God's word, and substituted a system of man's device for the sacred oracles, that corruption overspread Europe like a flood, and only when the

Holy Volume was unlocked, and its teaching directly brought to bear on the common people, did a moral and spiritual reformation set in. We think modern European history conclusively testifies that Bible teaching, in its strength and integrity, is the only safeguard against widespread corruption and great national misfortunes—and yet, not completely effective—for so impetuous is the current of evil that it cannot be stemmed entirely, and even the most Christian nations invite the rod of correction; and when they will not use the surgeon's knife themselves, a higher hand must cut out the cancer. Thus it was that slavery was wrenched from America by a bloody war, and thus, it is to be feared, some judgment will overtake us if we do not Christianise and elevate the degraded masses of our great towns. We conclude this side of our subject by the remark, that Christian civilisation, unlike that of antiquity, is essentially progressive. Wherever the good seed of Divine truth is allowed to fulfil its proper function of leavening society, there is a steady progress from age to age, and none of those deplorable relapses the heathen world exhibited.

No doubt there are ebbs and flows of a nation's life; there are periods of political growth and decline, but its real welfare keeps advancing, and each century marks a higher coast line in the tide of moral progress. There is no fear of any Christian nation, where the Bible holds its proper place, vanishing from the page of history like ancient Babylon and Tyre, or sinking into that slough of corruption, where Imperial Rome foundered.

CHAPTER IV.

A WRITTEN AND AUTHORITATIVE REVELATION NECESSARY.—THE BIBLE SHOWN TO BE SUCH.

WE now pass from the ground of history to examine this question in the light of man's nature and necessities, and to inquire, first, whether a written and permanent record of God's Revelation, such as we have in the Sacred Scriptures, is not the best, and indeed the only effectual, plan for preserving a true religion from age to age.

The great quarrel that modern scepticism has is with the Bible; it is not so much with Christianity as being a collection of lofty truths, as with the Inspired Volume that is the repository of these truths. The favourite view of many philosophers now-a-days is that the religion taught by Christ was the best ever made known to man; but it was a mixture of truth and error, which the rational and moral sense must examine for itself

without allowing its deductions to be overruled by any written authority, whether of St. Paul or of what the Evangelists relate of Christ. They hold that the Bible is a book full of errors—historical, scientific, and metaphysical, and that by rejecting its authority a purer digest of Christianity can be obtained by the enlightened mind of man. These people, represented now-a-days by Strauss and Renan on the Continent, and among English writers by Matthew Arnold, evoke an ideal Christ from their inner consciousness, and put him forward as far superior to the historical one. They strip His character of its miraculous claims, excise from His reported sayings whatever transcends their human reason, and thus construct a nebulous theory of Christianity, which they are weak enough to suppose will supplant the New Testament in the reverence of mankind.

We join issue with this school on the very threshold, and assert that there never could have been a Christian religion at all without an authoritative record. Let us suppose for a moment that the sayings of Christ had been loosely scattered to the winds; that they had been preserved in

no authentic shape; that His followers used their own judgment in deciding what to receive or reject—think you that such a loose system would ever have made its way against the fiery opposition of a corrupt age? Think you that the early disciples would have been willing to abandon all that men count dear, to lead lives of incessant hardship, with almost the certainty of a cruel death, all for the sake of a religion which existed in no authoritative shape, and which no two of them were agreed about? But the difficulties are enormously enhanced when we pass the Apostolic age. It is possible to imagine that the eye-witnesses of Christ, impressed by the holy words He uttered and the supernatual powers He claimed, might have propagated His teachings with some approach to uniformity, during their lifetime, even without the aid of written records or an acknowledged body of doctrine, or without what the Church claims for them—an indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, which ever kept in their memory what Christ had spoken. All this is perhaps credible, though barely so on mere rational grounds; but what shall we say to the

following age, when the feeble movement commenced by the fishermen of Galilee was to push its way on all sides among the philosophers of Athens and Alexandria, as well as the debased serfs of the Roman Empire—among the savage hordes of Scythia as among the mouldering remains of Oriental civilisation! How was a religion that was entirely based on the claims of a Person, and respecting whom such extraordinary facts were related, ever to make headway, unless the views of its teachers were to be accordant on all essential points? How was the heathen world to be induced to forsake those unholy pleasures which were its daily aliment, to give up its gladiator-shows, its impure dramas, its ancient oracles, its sacred groves, to crucify "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," if the expounders of this new religion, so distasteful to flesh and blood, had not the invincible sanction of a "Thus saith the Lord"? Christianity would inevitably have foundered amidst the opposition of an ungodly world, had an authoritative record of its origin not been preserved and acknowledged by the Christian

Church. Had it been open to question among the early Fathers, whether Christ really rose from the dead or not, whether He spoke the Sermon on the Mount, or wrought the miracle of the loaves and fishes, would it have been possible to have taught Christianity on any common ground? Nay, rather, would not the severe morality inculcated have been let down to the selfish demands of corrupt nature, and the divine lineaments of Christ's religion been hopelessly lost amid the fantastic shapes that human sophistry would have given to it? In other words, it would have become merely a system of philosophy, not a religion, and would have left as little trace on the future morals of mankind as did the teaching of Socrates, vaguely preserved as it is in the pages of Plato and Xenophon. Nothing appears to us more certain than that Christianity, humanly speaking, owes its enduring empire over man in an especial degree to the Book of Inspiration. It has formed a common ground, on which Greek and barbarian, learned and unlearned, bond and free, could always meet and its doctrines have been stated in a way that

commends them equally to every type of mankind and every degree of civilisation.

But the objection may be started, was not the early Church plagued by heretical sects? Do we not soon hear of Gnostics and Ebionites, of Marcionites and Manicheans? Were not the early Church fathers engaged in constant disputes with those schismatics? And if the New Testament had been universally accepted as the exposition of Christian doctrine, how came these divisions among the early Christians? We readily grant that there hung upon the skirts of the Christian Church, in the early ages, many false professors and many insidious friends. The name of Christian was used by many, whom Christ or His Apostles would have disowned. The heretical sects were in most cases the offspring of semi-Pagan accommodations of Christianity; instead of founding upon the Sacred Scriptures alone, they combined with them the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, of Philo of Alexandria, of Epictetus and Seneca; they were a spurious compound, which, in the nature of things, could not last, and thus we see them

dying out one by one; and those sects alone survived which made a common appeal to the Scriptures.

But it may be urged further, were there not early disputes about the canon of Scripture itself? Do we not hear of an epistle of Barnabas that obtained momentary authority, and some spurious gospels that floated about for some time in the early Church? The minds of many have been unsettled by allegations of this kind, which strike at the authority of the New Testament; for if indeed we have only a human compilation out of a mass of early writings, claiming equal authority, then truly we have a weak basis upon which to found an authoritative system of religion. It is not within the scope of these remarks to investigate the canonical claims of Holy Scripture, but we will adduce one or two considerations admitted to be true, which tend greatly to allay anxiety. The spurious books, claiming to be inspired, were few in number; they never were marked by the imprimatur of the catholic or universal Church. They never even acquired a decided ascendancy over any important section

of the true Church; and what is still more important, they differed widely in scope and character from the contents of our New Testament; their internal evidence of inferior origin is irresistible, and they very soon passed out of the category even of doubtful inspiration. The wonder is that, considering the ignorance of the age, and the want of critical knowledge, there should have been so few successful attempts to impose spurious accounts of Christ upon the early Church.

But graver difficulties have been started with regard to the canonicity of certain portions of our New Testament. Prodigious pains have been taken to invalidate the Gospel and Revelation of John and some of the minor Epistles, and to produce an impression that our canon is the growth of a later age, when corrupt additions were made by a cunning and selfish priesthood. Now we admit that some difficulties have been raised, which it is very hard, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, to answer in full. It is not possible now to say precisely at what period the several books of the New Testament made their appearance, and what was

their reception by the existing societies of Christians; but we do find in the early Church fathers such abundant quotations from the writings of the New Testament, that, had the original documents been lost, their place could almost have been supplied by means of these citations. This is especially true of the first three Gospels, which are largely quoted by all writers, from Justyn Martyr to Augustine. It is true that the earliest of the fathers do not quote freely from the writings of John, though some of them use phraseology so like his—instance, Justyn Martyr about the supper—that, if not a quotation, it was a free rendering of his ideas; but this comparative silence can be explained on the supposition—a most natural one—that John wrote in his old age. His Gospel was obviously given as a supplement to the synoptical accounts, and his revelation was a vision at Patmos, where he was banished in extreme old age; and it is quite supposable that his writings, which may not have been produced till towards the close of the first century, would not have been diffused widely through the Church till the middle of the next, and by that time we find them appear-

ing in citations as undoubtedly the word of God. Among the following Church fathers we find the Gospel of John as reverently quoted as the other three, and all alike treated as inspired records, and we also find a complete agreement from the earliest times in the reception of most of the Pauline Epistles; indeed we may say that historical criticism can do nothing to shake the fact that the bulk of what we call the New Testament was received from the earliest times as authoritative by the Christian Church, and all its controversies were settled by an appeal to it as to the oracles of God. Indeed it is quite remarkable to see what a general accord there is among the ante-Nicene fathers in the essential features of the Christian faith. Irenæus and Justyn Martyr, Cyprian and Tertullian, Clement and Origen, all preached substantially the same Gospel. With all these Christ was the Alpha and Omega, the sum and substance of their religion, and the great historical facts vouched for in the New Testament were never doubted by them. It is quite true they all had their minor differences; some of them had what we might even call extravagances, but there was no more difference

between them than can be accounted for by the individuality of the human mind, and by their varying circumstances; they differed as Luther and Calvin did, as Zwingle and Melancthon, as Cranmer and Knox; but there runs through all their writings that grand moral unity which attests the presence of one Divine spirit, and the groundwork of a common book of inspiration. We think the moral agreement of the early fathers in all their laborious controversies with the enemies of Christianity a very strong argument in favour of the existence and authority of a divine record of Christ's religion. They all appeal to it as to a final arbiter, and all their divergences of view are supported by reference to, or inference from, the word of God.

It was at a later age that the voice of the Church—the Catholic Church, as it was now called—came to be looked upon as having a conjoint, though not equal, authority with, the Holy Scriptures. When the Church, in the time of Constantine, passed from the phase of persecution to that of earthly power, an irruption of worldliness took place, and a rapid deterioration was witnessed in

the character of its teachers; the pure morality and spiritual religion of the New Testament became distasteful, and, as a natural consequence, were kept out of view as far as decency allowed. The idea of an infallible judgment residing in the Church, once started, spread with portentous rapidity, for it was obvious that such a claim, once admitted, gave boundless opportunity to the clergy to arrogate power; the copestone was laid on this theory when the infallible voice of the Church was made to speak through the Bishop of Rome, and the Papacy became the full-fledged embodiment of this doctrine. For many centuries the voice of God's word was seldom heard, and heaps of corrupt and frivolous additions were made to its simple requirements; but it is a noticeable fact that during all the dark ages of Popery there was no attempt to dispute the paramount authority of Scripture, or to tamper with the sacred text, and in this we recognise an unwilling testimony to the authority of God's revelation, and a proof of His watchful providence over the Sacred Volume. When we reflect upon the duplicity, the frauds, and even the barefaced forgeries that disgraced the Vatican

during the middle ages, one cannot but see the hand of God in the preservation intact of the Inspired Book. When we reflect that the canon law of Rome, as Janus has scathingly demonstrated, is little better than a compilation of wicked forgeries—pretended Papal decrees, pretended imperial concessions, and so forth—it is truly surprising that the unscrupulous priesthood, who then had the custody of most of the manuscripts of the New Testament, never dared to alter the sacred text so as to support any of these fictitious claims, and the Codex Vaticanus ranks at this day, in the judgment of scholars, as equal in authority to the Sinaitic and Alexandrian, the three oldest and purest MSS. of the New Testament that are known to exist.

But what shall we say about the textual errors of the New Testament? Is it not true that we have many different readings of the sacred text, and how can this be reconciled with the theory of an authoritative record, inspired by God Himself? No subject of modern times has engaged so much erudition as this one of the proper text of the New Testament. Hundreds of scholars

have made it a life work, many of them possessed of the acutest minds and extraordinary perseverance, and it may fairly be asserted now, that no important variation among the ancient codices remains undiscovered. The eagerness with which this question has been pursued may be judged from the fact that great questions of ecclesiastical policy sometimes hung upon the rendering of a few words of Scripture, and sects that had vehemently opposed each other for centuries would have given worlds to get a morsel of additional weight to their respective theories from the Word of God. But what has been the net result of all this investigation? We believe we are within the mark when we say that not a single leading doctrine has been touched or any of the great features of Revelation altered in an appreciable degree. The textual variations,—and they amount to thousands,—are, in the great majority of cases, minute verbal alterations, in no way affecting the sense of the passage—just such variations as must have resulted from repeated copyings of dusty and well-worn MSS. by human hands. There is a marvellous absence of intentional interpolation,

and we do not believe it can be shown that, in the fourteen centuries when the world was dependent on the pen of the copyist for the transmission of the Divine Word, there was ever a *bona fide* attempt of any importance to tamper with the original text. No classical work has stood the stress of modern criticism in the way that the New Testament has done. The works of Plato and Aristotle have been handled so freely by modern critics that the original text recedes into a nebulous background. Even Shakespeare is a battle-ground for textual purists, and it is surprising how many various readings are supported by good authority, and yet Shakespeare wrote when printing had given an author incomparable advantages over the writers of the New Testament. We venture to predict that eighteen hundred years after Shakespeare wrote, the true text of his plays will be involved in immensely greater obscurity than are the writings of the New Testament at the present day.

The argument against the authority of the New Testament, drawn from its textual variations, falls to the ground when thoroughly sifted; indeed a

strong argument may be made out in favour of a special Providence from the wonderful success that has attended the preservation of the Divine records.

We have not touched here upon the question of the textual purity of the Old Testament; it requires an extent of learning which the writer does not possess, nor has it an essential bearing upon the general scope of our argument. We will only remark, that the Hebrew race paid extraordinary attention to the preservation of their sacred books; their scribes counted not merely the words, but the letters in the Old Testament, and the copies were revised with the most vigilant care, so that there is every reason to believe that our Hebrew version of the Old Testament is identical with what the Jews possessed many hundreds of years before Christ.

The general conclusion to which we are led from these observations is as follows:—A written and authoritative record of God's revelation was necessary to perpetuate the Christian religion. That record has been provided in the Bible. It comes down to us with the sanction of the univer-

sal Church; it is attested by the most abundant evidence, as having from the earliest times spoken with the authority of the word of God, and there is no proof that it has been tampered with to any appreciable extent, but ample evidence that we have the *ipsissima verba* of the writers as closely as is compatible with the fact, that human agency has transmitted them through countless generations, and that God has not chosen to work a special miracle on their behalf.

CHAPTER V.

ALLEGED INEXACTNESS OF THE BIBLE—ITS TEACHING PICTORIAL RATHER THAN SCIENTIFIC.

THUS much for the outward and historical side of our argument, and now we shall turn to the inward, or subjective side, and examine some of the objections brought against the New Testament, on the ground of its contents.

We shall first deal with that well-worn objection, drawn from the many sects into which Christians are divided, and the common appeal they make to the word of God in support of their views. Arians and Socinians, Calvinists and Arminians, all alike, find or profess to find in Scripture the basis of their theology, and yet it cannot be denied that the difference between their systems is very important. It is a specious objection that a Book which can be interpreted in so many different ways is unworthy of the

rank it holds. It is alleged that it cannot be the workmanship of God if it speaks with so uncertain a voice. Surely, the Deity, if He spoke at all, would do so in accents so clear, that man's versatile intellect would be shut up to the single function of receiving the divine mandate. We believe there is no excuse which the unbeliever so often furnishes to his own conscience as this of the supposed uncertainty of what the Bible teaches. Now we will distinguish *in limine* between two groups of controversies that have been waged since the time of Christ about the Christian religion. One of them is represented by the Gnostics and other sects of ancient times, who assigned the Bible a secondary place, and treated reason and philosophy as of conjoint authority. The rationalistic schools of to-day are their lineal successors, and the Bible is to them a book of only limited authority. We hold that all the sects which have sprung from this impure source lie outside the pale of honest difference of Christian opinion. There is no limit to the fantastic shapes into which they throw Christian doctrine, and the Bible has no

right to be discredited by the extravagances they have foisted upon it. The real objections to the Bible, grounded upon its supposed variety of teaching, are only to be fairly argued on the platform of honest belief, and in this part of our argument we have only to deal with the differences among those sects which agree in ascribing paramount authority to the word of God.

Now we admit that there do exist, there always have existed, and probably always will exist, honest varieties of opinion about what the Bible teaches on some of the multifarious points in which it comes into contact with human life; and this is not to be wondered at. It is the unavoidable consequence of the kind of revelation God has thought best to make to man, or, rather, we should say, of the kind which man's imperfect faculties alone enabled him to receive. In constructing the Bible, the Divine architect had to bear in mind the immense variety in the capacity and culture of the human race, and the Book had to be written so as to suit all alike—so as to minister spiritual life to the child

as to the man, to the unlettered savage as to the philosopher. Many handle the Bible as though it had been designed only for the learned, and expect to find in it nothing but elaborate digests of theology and that scientific and logical development that scientific intellects crave; but in the eye of the Almighty the soul of the savage is as precious as that of the sage, and as the vast majority of His creatures always have been, and always must be, unlearned, the Book which is to guide them to Himself must needs be simple in its structure and easy to understand.

Hence it comes to pass that the Bible differs from all philosophical works; its teaching is pictorial rather than metaphysical; it affords a vast number of dissolving views in which man is seen in relation to God in every conceivable circumstance of life; instead of describing faith by abstruse researches into our mental powers, it paints the working of the principle in the life of Abraham; instead of analysing love psychologically, it shows us John leaning on Jesus' bosom; in displaying that grandest of attributes in the Almighty it holds up to the

gaze of mankind the cross of Christ—that most affecting spectacle of self-sacrifice the world has ever seen; in impressing us with the awfulness and majesty of Jehovah, we have that wonderful panorama where Sinai thundered and the people trembled, while the trumpet sounding loud and long heralded the giving of the law.

We might multiply instances indefinitely to show with what marvellous skill the Book of God exhibits to the uncultured mind of man the deepest principles of the Divine nature. In reading the Scriptures, the glory of the Lord, as in a glass, passes before the mind, and the image of the Eternal mirrors itself on the human soul almost without its being aware of it. But this pictorial style of teaching is not capable of being resolved into rigid metaphysical systems, and hence, whenever the attempt is made to compress all the features of God's revelation into a severe system of thought, differences arise among men; but it is the glory of the Book, and not its weakness, that this is the case. It is a proof that it comes from One who is higher than man, and can address his moral nature through all its thousand channels, without

being cramped and confined by the artificial rules that man must needs conform to when he sets up to be a teacher. The book of revelation and the book of nature are from the same hand, and they show striking resemblances; in both there is inexhaustible variety; in both there is an apparent disregard of all system, and yet underneath both there is a deep harmony, and the careful observer can find out a network of symmetrical laws which vindicate the wisdom of the Author. The simple rustic can find enjoyment in nature without knowing much of its laws, and so the simple believer can find spiritual life in the Bible though he knows little of theology, and can scarcely express in intelligible language the thoughts that burn within him.

It is an absolute necessity of man's moral nature that divine truth should be taught in the Bible popularly rather than scientifically; the unenlightened mind of man can only learn of God, "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little;" it approaches the comprehension of the infinite mind of God, as an infant comes to understand his father. The little child

at first can only learn through the medium of his senses, the reflective faculties are dormant; he must be punished for doing wrong before he learns the reason why; he is denied many things he longs after before it can be explained to him that they are unwholesome; the first part of his education is the simple lesson of obedience to his parents, and it is only in riper years that he finds out the wisdom that taught him obedience; furthermore, in his infancy he can be taught only by symbols—he cannot understand language, much less reasoning, but he can soon learn to distinguish a look of displeasure from one of complacency, a tone of anger from the cooing of maternal love. Neither is it possible for a young child to receive full and complete ideas of anything; his first conceptions are in a crude and concrete form: his mother has taught him to shun the fire, and perhaps he has burned his finger, and his first impression of fire is one of dread; he has fallen into a well and nearly been drowned, and for a time he only thinks of wells with a shudder. From this it is evident that the teachers of a child can only at first tell it half-truths—it is essential that it should avoid fire

and water, and so its parents speak of them at first as things only to be feared, and the qualifications with which these statements must be received, in order to give a complete representation of the truth, are out of place at this stage of education.

So it is most wisely in God's revelation to man. Many of its statements appear to contain only half-truths, because they can in no other way find an entrance into the dull, untutored mind of the spiritual babe. Thus, when Christ finds the Pharisees consumed with covetousness, and despising the poor, He tells them the parable of Dives and Lazarus. He represents the rich man as enduring torments, and the beggar as going to Abraham's bosom; nor is there any moral reason assigned for the difference. The rich man is not represented as wicked, nor the poor man as pious; there are none of those qualifications stated that are necessary to give complete expression to the justice of the award. There is seemingly a partial and one-sided description, but the great Teacher knew how to press home a great truth through the thick crust of human selfishness. He wished to strip riches of their meretricious glory, and show

the insignificance of man's earthly lot, compared with his eternal destiny; and so He wisely concentrated attention on that single point, and did not weaken the effect by throwing in qualifying statements. This principle furnishes a key to many difficulties in interpreting the Bible. It is not its habit to surround great truths with all their balancing considerations; it leaves those to be gathered from other portions of the field. When Christ says—"Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away," He does not in the same breath warn against encouraging imposture, and giving to vagabonds; but we find the Apostle Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, forbidding that widows be supported by the Church unless they are old and deserving, and declaring, with respect to idle Church members, that "if any man will not work, neither shall he eat"—a pretty sure proof that He reprobated indiscriminate alms-giving.

The Bible is a book full of sublime truths, stated in the most striking manner, and so as irresistibly to penetrate the self-love of man. God well knew the tendency of the human mind to sophisticate

and explain away distasteful duties, till nothing remained but a few shreds of the original principle. He knew how the Pharisees paid tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and neglected the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and the love of God; how they robbed widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers, and therefore He told them, in words that could never be explained away, "Sell that ye have and give alms, provide yourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the Heavens that fadeth not, where no thief entereth neither moth corrupteth, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." But lest this saying, if isolated from all other teaching on the subject, should prove too hard a rule of life, we find that the Apostle is enjoined by the Spirit thus to define the duties of rich men: "Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal

life." The great principle is laid down by Christ that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, and the practical application by Paul is that, when God gives wealth, He intends it to be used, like all His other gifts, in subservience to His glory and the good of men. We find the same twofold style of teaching regarding prayer, chastity, patience, and the leading virtues of the Christian character. Certain mandates are delivered respecting them of terrible incisiveness, which cut so deep indeed into the propensities of man and the customs of society, that they appear impracticable when looked at nakedly; but in searching the Scripture we come upon balancing truths which take off the hard edge of the commandment, and bring it into harmonious adjustment to the varied necessities of life; and hence it happens that the timid believer, who is at first staggered by the apparent harshness of the Divine commandments, discovers after a while that they admit of wonderful adaptation to the exigencies of life; and that, though they stand out in virgin purity, like the snow-clad peaks of the Alps, never condescending to accommodate them-

selves to any form of human evil, they do not harshly override the intricate mechanism of social life, but rather mould it so as to prove the truth of that Scripture: "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come."

If we are right in this view of the Bible, it will follow that man will draw from it various lessons at the different stages of his spiritual growth. When his eyes are first opened to the supreme importance of eternal things, he is apt to despise altogether temporal things; he hears only such language as this: "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." "This world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God continueth ever." There is no room to attend to such minor injunctions as, "We exhort you to be quiet and to do your own business and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you." Like the early Christians, who lived in daily expectation of the coming of the Lord, and thus neglected their temporal concerns, he sees no importance in man's earthly relationships while his mind is absorbed with the things of eternity;

but gradually he comes to see that God does not mean to divorce us from this world, and that we are to use it while not abusing it, and he finds the Bible full of minute instructions about the duties of life. His horizon expands, and the life beyond is not seen in violent antagonism to the life below, but rather as its complement and full development; he sees the gracious purpose of God running through all things, and voices from the eternal world reach him even in the workshop and at the plough. Now this spiritual growth is entirely in accord with the laws of our nature, and the Bible, in providing for it, shows consummate knowledge of man: it has, in a very true and real sense, an exoteric and an esoteric circle; not like the philosophies of old, which despised the vulgar and declined to stoop from their oracular heights, but proceeding by a gentle gradation so that the babe may find milk and the man strong meat. Nor is human learning needed in order to understand the deep things of God, but only the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who is promised to all who ask Him.

CHAPTER VI.

VARIETIES OF OPINION INEVITABLE FROM THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE.

IT must be evident to any one who reflects upon these facts, that the materials lie ready for numerous schools of thought among even true believers. Those who are in the stage of spiritual infancy will not see truth in the same light as those in spiritual manhood; the worldly Christians who have not progressed far will stumble at the lofty utterances of those who have been within the veil. Even the intellectual differences of man will be reflected in the interpretation of the Bible: the narrow matter-of-fact mind will lean toward hard literal interpretation; the imaginative mind will prefer the figurative; the recluse who shuns the world will look at human life with a tinge of monasticism; the busy man of affairs will find in the Bible an endless repertory of practical maxims for daily life.

In the free play of Christian society sects and churches must necessarily arise embodying those types of character, and their statements of Divine truth, and their applications to human life, will vary within the degrees we have indicated, without overstepping the bounds of genuine orthodoxy. We thus see a true reflection of Scriptural teaching in bodies so far apart as the Calvinists and the Quakers; and even the High Church and the Plymouth Brethren have a meeting-point in the Bible, and occupy a large common ground—probably much larger than they would respectively admit.

There is, in fact, a great resemblance between political and Christian societies, in respect of their variety of structure and creed. One who looked cursorily over the nations of the world might conclude that there are no axioms of political science—so extraordinary a diversity of Government does he see; but the more careful student will find many points of resemblance between the most diverse, and, what is more important, a steady progress towards certain cardinal ideals of order, liberty, and intelligence. He will also find a fitness

in the different Governments to the various degrees of civilization. The despotism of the Czar suits the ignorant Russian, while Republicanism best suits the intelligent Anglo-Saxon in North America; and what will surprise him much will be the large common ground which is occupied by Government both in Russia and America. In like manner the Episcopal and Presbyterian polity, the rudimentary Church-life of the Bible Christians, and the pre-eminently elaborate system of Wesley, cover a wide area of common ground, and serve as true channels for the varying requirements of Christian Society.

This leads us to observe further, that the differences among Christians are not owing entirely to varieties of thought among individual believers. Another cause has co-operated with this and served not a little to deepen and indurate these differences—we refer to the influence of ecclesiastical organisations. When large bodies of professed Christians associated themselves in churches, the framework of organisation that bound them together acquired an adventitious importance, and so questions of

Church polity came to get a degree of importance they do not hold in the Bible. The clergy attached to those bodies came, by the force of circumstances, to spend much of their time in defending their ecclesiastical systems, and in the heat of controversy the small points of difference were magnified into essentials, and the lines drawn deep and broad around each Church enclosure. The Episcopalian, to hold his own against the levelling system of the Presbyterian, had to develope a doctrine of Apostolical succession; and the Puritan, to hold his ground against the Quaker and Antinomian, had to formulate a rigid and metaphysical confession of faith. The exigencies of ecclesiastical warfare widened the differences between Christian sects, just as those of political warfare deepened the dislikes and dissimilarities between nations.

But we would ask those who assail the Bible, and with it the religion of Christ, on the ground of those dissensions, how they could possibly have been avoided in any revelation appealing to man as a moral and rational being? If Christ had merely established a system of ordinances, like

Moses, it would have been possible to prevent differences and schisms among His followers, for any difficulty might have been solved by an appeal to the bare letter of the commandment; but such a system would not have been the school of education that Christianity is: the very disputes about the teaching of the Bible lead to a vigorous exercise of the moral and rational faculties, and conduct man to a higher spiritual manhood than a leaden system of outward uniformity could do. A torpid uniformity in the Christian Church would have meant spiritual death; it is that which the Ultramontane party in the Church of Rome aims at: it would quench the light of individual conscience, and condense all religion into a slavish submission to the Papal decrees, and we see what its effects have been in all countries that have submitted to its sway. The stifled intellect and conscience of man, after a long slumber, have burst their bonds, and, hating the very name of religion, have too often plunged into gross materialism. The constant ferment of religious opinion which the Bible is fitted to produce, and always will produce in any country where thought is free,

is so far from being an objection against the Christian religion, that it is a proof of its divine origin. The Author of the human mind well knew that its faculties needed constant exercise to keep them bright, and that the doctrines of religion would take deepest root when they had to be received after diligent search, and defended with zeal; therefore He has seen it best to spread His truth in a large and free manner over the face of the Bible as He has spread plants and flowers over the face of nature, and there will be room in all time for theologians to classify and systematise the truths of the Bible, as there is room for botanists to group and arrange the herbs of the field; and we may add, to complete the parallel, that there will always be room for minor differences between the systems of different thinkers, while in their great outlines they will exhibit a substantial unity.

But it may be objected by some, that these arguments prove too much: if the Bible be indeed so inexact in its statements, and capable of being honestly interpreted in so many different ways, is there not danger that the inquirer may miss "the way of salvation?" does it not throw a cloud of

doubt about all theology, and indeed disparage the Sacred Volume, for if God has not spoken clearly, then Christianity loses half its sanctions? There is no doubt that fears like these have led good men to claim for the Bible an exactness of definition it does not possess, and it has led the various schools of theology to fight for their special renderings with a vehemence that was only justified by the plea that they possessed the whole of the truth and that their opponents taught dangerous error. But we must guard ourselves from being misunderstood. We do not allege that the Bible speaks inexactly on the great truths that it is indispensable man should know: its voice is singularly clear and uniform on the essentials of religion. Man is ever represented as a sinner, and God as holy and just and good; the New Testament speaks habitually of Christ as the alone Mediator between God and man, and it holds no parley with the rejecter of Christ; it makes Him the Alpha and Omega of its teaching; it is as far apart from mere Deism as it is possible to suppose; there is not a line in the New Testament that casts doubt on the death of Christ, His resurrection and

ascension, on the life to come, the future judgment and the retribution awarded to all men; these great truths, and many others dependent upon them, among which we would specially mention the great doctrine of the Atonement, are written with the clearness of a sunbeam, and he that runneth may read. There is no difficulty whatever in the honest seeker after truth finding what the Scriptures teach on the essentials of salvation. That difficulties sometimes have been found, has arisen very much from the unreasonable claims of sects who have incorporated their points of difference, often very secondary ones, with the essentials of Christianity, and demanded the reception of all alike on the peril of outlawry. But the fault is with man, not with God; He has made His will sufficiently clear to those who will study it aright, and He has promised the Holy Spirit to those who seek His blessed influence.

And this leads us to remark that something more is needed than diligence and study to understand the Scriptures. No catechisms, formularies, or creeds can lodge a system of Divine truth in the soul of man; nay, it may be for this very reason

that God has caused the Bible to be written in so unsystematic a manner; it may be to drive man to rely on the teaching of that Spirit of Truth which Christ promised to all believers, and of whom it is testified that "He will guide you into all truth." Hardly any doctrine is set forth more copiously than this, that man needs the teaching of the Spirit of God to enable him to understand the truth of God, and it is mere bibliolatry that would divorce the Bible from its living expositor. This fact takes away much of the difficulty that has been made of the inexactness of Scriptural language. Had the New Testament been framed like the ceremonial law, there would have been little use for the guidance of the Spirit; but written as it is, with many difficulties to the human mind, with many deep things hard to be understood, and with many simple things stated in a way that at first sight puzzles the understanding, there is abundant need for the teaching of that Spirit of whom it is said, "the deep things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God." The beautiful consequence of this law is that humility is a primary requisite to the full understanding of Scripture. The proud

self-reliant soul will not stoop to be taught of the Spirit; but the humble believer will grow rich in that knowledge which endures unto life eternal. "The natural man knoweth not the things of God, for they are foolishness unto him—but the spiritual man judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged by no man." We see, therefore, that it is the Word of God as interpreted by the Spirit of God that forms the groundwork of Christianity. It is neither alone; the Word divorced from the Spirit leads to hard scholastic theology; the Spirit divorced from the Word leads to mysticism. The union of the two gives a basis of dogmatic belief, combined with that pliancy and sweetness which form the complete Christian. When free play is given to this two-fold revelation of God, there will not be vital differences among believers in Christ; there will no doubt be divergences upon minor points so long as man is a finite creature, with a limited understanding, but the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" will manifest itself by the brotherly love of Christians, and testify to the world that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all,"

PART II.

RATIONALISM AND MIRACLES.

PART II.

RATIONALISM AND MIRACLES.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTIANITY INSEPARABLY INTERWOVEN WITH MIRACLE.

WE now pass to another side of the Christian Controversy, which engrosses much attention at the present day. We refer to *the miraculous claims of Christianity*. There is a widespread aversion now-a-days to believe in miracles; the scientific mind finds in all departments of nature the evidence of law—of a uniform ordered course of events, and recoils from the thought that the Creator could ever have set aside His own laws. There is amongst many of our scientific men an invincible repugnance to receive what the Bible tells us of the miraculous doings of Christ, and

immense ingenuity has been expended to eliminate this element from Christianity, without destroying its texture: it is thought that the moral and supernatural can be separated, and that Christianity can be retained while rejecting miracles. We believe this to be a delusion; miracle is so interwoven with the framework of the Bible that the two must stand or fall together, and that colourless compound, which may be extracted from the Scriptures, after all the supernatural is expunged, will never form the basis of a Divine religion.

We use here the terms miraculous and supernatural as synonymous for the sake of convenience, though they are not strictly so. The former is usually restricted to visible and external interference with the course of nature; whereas the latter properly applies to all divine manifestations transcending human experience; and thus some of Christ's sayings and doings may be termed supernatural, or, at least, superhuman, which are not strictly miraculous. But we are chiefly concerned here with the objections urged against the miraculous events, properly so called, related in the New Testament.

One chief reason, we believe, why the philosophic intellect has difficulty in assenting to these statements, besides the one already mentioned, is that so many alleged miracles have been proved historically to be false. All the heathen systems of religion, all the corrupt forms of Christianity, have put forward miraculous claims, most of which appear, at this day, transparently absurd. The Church of Rome has done much to abuse this source of influence. She has traded upon the superstitious element in man's nature to the utmost, and has fabricated so many false miracles, that it is not to be wondered at if hasty generalisers have refused credence to whatever savours of supernatural power.

But hasty generalisation is the fruitful source of many errors, and is, in an especial sense, the stumbling-block of the present day. Men who pretend to be philosophers take hasty glances at human history, and, perceiving well-marked tendencies of the human mind in the direction of superstition, conclude that all belief which transcends human reason must be superstitious. If they would follow the example of great physical

investigators, and seek for reliable facts rather than theories, and refuse to generalise beyond what well-ascertained facts will warrant, they would show more diffidence in pronouncing that all miracle is impossible.

So far as mere *a priori* reasoning is concerned, we should be disposed to argue that just because the mind of man craves after miraculous attestation, therefore God, in making a revelation, would accredit it by miracle. He would adapt Himself to the laws of man's mind, and bring that evidence before it which was best fitted to satisfy it; and no one who knows anything of psychology will deny that wherever man believes in miracle he instinctively sees the hand of God, and nothing else so effectually awes him into submission to a higher power.

If it be once granted that God has made a revelation at all, it is most natural and fitting that He should attest it by supernatural means; indeed, we know no other way in which a divine religion could be introduced into an unbeliving world—a religion most unpalatable to the human mind, and relying entirely upon moral force for its

diffusion. The miracles of Christ, so far from being out of harmony with His mission, are indeed necessary to give it completeness and credibility. If He indeed came from God, and went to God, as He alleged, and was commissioned to announce new and startling truths hateful to the teachers of the day, was it not most reasonable that He should appeal to His Father in heaven for miraculous confirmation of His authority, and was it not most reasonable that God should answer that appeal? Surely, if the Christian religion is from God at all, it is worthy of being attested by miracles. It has to do with the most vital interests of man, and if God thought it essential for man to know it, why should He refuse that attestation which He could easily give, and without which it would be impossible to secure credence for it among mankind? It appears to us that the repugnance to miracles is closely connected with a repugnance to believe in a personal and living God. Whenever the mind fully receives the idea of God as a living, conscious Being, having a will and affections, as He is represented in the Bible to have, belief in miracles, when properly attested,

naturally follows; for it is impossible to believe that such a God as this would refuse to manifest Himself to man in the way that man's faculties can most surely apprehend Him. The disbelievers in miracles are in a great degree disbelievers in God—probably to a much greater extent than they are aware of, or would admit to be true. The God they believe in is a pantheistic abstraction or a figurative expression for the laws of nature—as Matthew Arnold has lately defined it to be, "the stream of tendency which all things have to fulfil the law of their being." Their idea of God is not very far removed from atheism; He is one who shrouds Himself amid nature's laws, and sits far away, passionless and serene, like the Olympian deities of Homer, who quaffed nectar and feasted on ambrosia, regardless of the sufferings of man. He is, in fact, the slave of nature, not its ruler; for He cannot suspend the laws He has set in motion, He cannot speak to man in audible accents, as that, forsooth, would be a departure from the etiquette of the universe! Better that man should perish than that God should step out of the eternal silence to speak to his immortal

soul! If the Bible tells us anything at all, it tells us that God is above nature and apart from nature, and it proves this in the only way which could ever have carried conviction to the ordinary human mind, viz., by miraculous interposition.

It has always appeared to us an unaccountable fact that men of intelligence and moral worth should hold that the Christain religion is in some sense divine, and yet reject all that savours of the miraculous. There are many who go to the New Testament for moral teaching, and allow that Jesus Christ revealed more of God's mind than any prophet the world has seen, and yet regard as fabulous all His claims to supernatural power and all the miraculous doings recorded of Him. We hold that it is utterly impossible to separate the historical veracity of the New Testament from its moral and spiritual teaching: they are interwoven in so close an embrace that they cannot be severed without mutual destruction. Mankind would never submit to the life of self-denial imposed by Christ if they were to think that He claimed powers that were

fictitious; the sanction of His authority would be gone, the spell would be dissolved in an instant that taught men to die for His religion, the whole domain of revelation would be relegated to the limbo of uncertainty, and all efficient motive withdrawn to a life of holiness. The absolute truthfulness of Christ is a first condition to the reception of His teaching, and not merely His absolute truthfulness, but the sanction of His divine authority: it is the feeling that He speaks with the voice of God, and will one day be the Judge of men, which triumphs over man's inclination to evil. Those know little of the struggles and self-denial that a life of faith imposes, who think that it can be sustained by a Christ who was full of illusions and errors. When He requires that we should pluck out our right eye and cut off our right hand rather than let them offend us, who would listen to the injunction, if the voice that spoke was that of an erring mortal? When He commands us to run counter to the strongest currents of our nature, who would have grace to obey if none believed the Teacher to be divine? His teaching would be less weighty than that of

Socrates and Seneca, indeed infinitely less; for they laid claim to no *imaginary* powers: they delivered their message with much weight of learning and with undoubted sincerity of aim; but Christ did not deign to avail Himself of human learning at all, and, according to this monstrous theory, enforced His teaching by pretended miracles, or, at least, by conniving at those who did so. To our mind, a more impossible theory was never imagined than that of a teacher charged with the most weighty truth, loving the souls of men even to the death, and yet fighting with the weapons of grossest deception.

But some allege that Christ was Himself the victim of deception. He imagined He had miraculous power, and the ready credulity of the age ratified the claim. We are asked to contemplate the great Teacher, whose words penetrated the depths of man's nature, so weak as to suppose that He raised the dead and walked on the waves, while yet He was innocent of any power beyond what a spiritualist lays claim to now-a-days. The proposition needs only to be stated to be scouted with disgust; it outrages, not merely all Christian

feeling, but all reverence for truth that abides in the human breast.

The only theory that deserves to be seriously examined, is that which denies that Christ ever did or claimed to do anything miraculous, and that all the miracles recorded in the New Testament are the accretions of a later age that have gathered round the central figure. We are invited by this school to conceive of an ideal Christ, who taught moral truth, and exerted such influence by the purity of His life that His followers canonised Him, and surrounded Him, in after ages, with a corona of miracle, and put into His lips language He never uttered.

This theory finds favour with many who have never weighed the excessive improbabilities it involves, or who shut their eyes to these improbabilities because they are blinded by prejudice. We venture to say that if they were to take the New Testament in their hand, and run the pen through every passage that would need to be expunged or altered on this theory, they would be astonished to find the consequences it involved them in, and if they would go further and re-write

the Gospel narrative on this improved pattern, we venture to predict that few honest men could avoid one or other of these alternatives—either reject as hopeless nonsense a book and religion so charged with falsehood, or reject the theory that involved such dreadful conclusions.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHIEF MIRACLE OF ALL—THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST—THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

BUT we will go into the matter more minutely, and attempt to show, in detail, some of the consequences that must be faced, if all the miraculous and supernatural element be expunged from the New Testament; and we will first deal with that foundation-stone of the Christian religion —the alleged resurrection of Christ. We are willing to take this as a crucial test, believing that if it be untrue, the whole fabric of Christianity falls to the ground, and if it can be established, the other miracles recorded become both natural and credible.

Now, if it be untrue that Christ rose from the dead, the following difficulties must be faced. The four Evangelists all give a minute and particular account of the Resurrection, differing, it is true, in some trifling details, but agreeing in all the lead-

ing features, and bearing every internal evidence of truthfulness. The very discrepancies show that there was no collusion between the writers, but that each described what he had seen or heard from his own point of view. The Evangelists themselves were either apostles who knew Christ intimately, or companions of the Apostles, and perfectly familiar with all that these knew about their Master, and who evidently wrote from the fulness of their knowledge. We are to suppose, then, that these godly men invented this pious fraud, and somehow palmed it off on the multitudes who embraced the Christian faith a few years after Christ's death; and we are further to believe that all the Apostles themselves conspired to propagate the fiction, and that they went about narrating everywhere that they had seen Christ repeatedly after His resurrection, that they had eaten and drunk with Him, handled Him, listened to His voice, and finally beheld Him, with their own eyes, ascending to Heaven from the Mount of Olives. We are further to believe that they invented a whole system of doctrines, based upon the resurrection of Christ, and that they went about the world proclaiming this as essential to the

salvation of men, appealing to God, in the most solemn manner, to sanction the falsehood, and willing to endure persecution, and to lay down life itself in attestation of the lie. We are further to believe that they taught this fabulous story so connectedly and harmoniously that their followers never detected any disagreement, or suspected them of inventing it. Though Peter and Paul and James are recorded to have differed on ceremonial questions, and to have had sharp disputes, yet we are to believe that they never suffered a hint to escape them in one unguarded moment, that their story of the resurrection was a myth; nay, that they kept the secret so well during their whole lives that a great multitude of believers, in all parts of the world, received it as the corner-stone of their religion, many of whom suffered and died for it, and not one of whom that we know of ever doubted it; and the countless millions of believers who have followed have all shared this delusion, lived in the belief that the risen Saviour was at God's right hand, and had given them in His resurrection a pledge that they would likewise rise from their graves.

Again, we have the memorable circumstance

that the Gospel narratives all record the Resurrection in a way that reflects discredit on the Apostles themselves. They are represented as having received from Christ Himself in His lifetime several intimations of His approaching death and resurrection, and yet when He was betrayed they all forsook Him and fled; and Peter, His boldest follower, denied Him thrice with oaths: and so entirely did they lose confidence in their Master, that when He rose from the grave they were utterly incredulous, and refused to believe till Christ had showed Himself to them several times in the most unmistakeable manner. How came it that the Apostles allowed such a discreditable version to get afloat if the whole affair was a concoction of their own? Was ever such an absurdity known as a body of men inventing a stupendous fiction, and then narrating it so as to mortify their self-esteem in the most poignant manner? Had they narrated the resurrection in such a way as to set forth their own glory, or secure some earthly advantage for themselves, it might have been maintained with some show of reason that they had conspired to delude the

world; but that they should have invented this lie, and told it, in a way most humiliating to themselves, and submitted to be treated as the offscourings of the earth all the rest of their lives, simply to hoax mankind, is a theory so preposterous that we marvel any man should hold it who has not parted company with his reason or his conscience.

But we will put aside this theory of wilful imposture, and deal with another alternative—that of unconscious illusion on the part of the Evangelists and all the twelve. This is the favourite view of modern rationalists; they have boundless faith in human credulity, and have no difficulty in reconciling the purest moral teaching with the most complete hallucination. They hold that the disciples of Christ were the victims of their heated imaginations, or, as some of them would put it, so impregnated with Messianic expectations that they fancied they saw Christ after He was risen, and dreamed the beautiful myth of His ascension from the Mount of Olives. What a mass of absurdities this theory brings to view! These men, so godly, so simple in their

lives, so truthlike in all their statements, so utterly unlike the visionary in their entire cast of character—these men, so matter of fact in their mental constitution that they were always misunderstanding their Master when He spoke in parables, and needed to question Him whenever He used figurative language—these men so slow to learn spiritual truths, so carnal in their first conceptions of Christ's Kingdom, we are to conceive of, as with one consent dreaming the wildest dream that ever entered the mind of man—a dream of an empty tomb, of a vision of angels, of an apparition of their Master during forty days, of His dialogue with Thomas, of that unbelieving disciple thrusting his hands into the prints of the nails, and lastly of their Master's ascension to heaven! These simple and guileless men, most of them rustics from Galilee, are somehow all to imagine they saw these things, and all to relate them with unvarying uniformity during their lifetime, and to teach them with such evident sincerity that the Church of Christ from that day to this has never doubted them! We are further to suppose that the Apostle Paul was the victim of sheer hallucination when

he saw the heavenly vision, that he was changed from being the bitter persecutor of the Christians to their greatest champion, all through a piece of phantasmagoria, that, in fact, his whole mind and character were changed as by the spell of an enchanter! So removed is the process from all that we know of human life and conduct, that we find ourselves involuntarily thinking of Aladdin's lamp or the wand of Circe; for surely no poet of romance ever dreamed of sorcery more unearthly than those men of pure reason who transform Saul the bigoted Pharisee into Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles by a stroke of the magician's wand! Surely, to these modern ideologists nothing is impossible! That Pio Nono should dream a dream some night and the next day awake a follower of John Wesley, with a complete, well-balanced Protestant creed, would appear nothing impossible!—that he should go about the world denouncing his former life as wicked and his former religion as false—that he should submit to intense privations in defence of his new creed, and finally lay down his life for it—would all prove nothing as to the soundness

of his convictions, nor involve the necessity of believing for a moment that he gave a true account of the method of his conversion! This marvellous phenomenon could all be explained by supposing a mental hallucination! Truly, in their eyes the region of spiritual ideas is a region of enchantment!—it lies far above and beyond all rules of evidence, all rational and moral considerations! They have no difficulty in conceiving that the acute and logical mind of Paul should have performed a somersault in a single hour, abjured the faith of his prime and taught a system the exact contrary of it for the remaining thirty years of his life; that this system should have been reasoned out with such convincing power as to mould Christian theology for all time, and enforced with such self-sacrifice as none but the Master Himself ever surpassed; and yet the basis of this sublime life, of this marvellous edifice of Christian doctrine, was the fantastic dream that one day at noon the Lord Jesus spoke to him from heaven!

We envy not those whose spiritual diagnosis is so grotesque; we envy not those moral perceptions which can praise the great Apostle, and

convict him in the same breath of being a lunatic. We have difficulty in conceiving on what foundation they would plant morality at all, when they hold that the best religion may be taught on a basis of puerile fiction! In what respect is St. Paul to be placed above Joe Smith or Joanna Southcote, not to speak of Mahomet, if his story of the heavenly vision is nonsense, and all his teaching about the resurrection a fable? They will say that his morality is purer; but even that may be questioned, for, on their theory, he taught men to cast away their earthly goods, to face the disruption of family, to risk life itself—all for belief in a myth. As Demetrius the silversmith truly said, he turned the world upside down; and, as he himself said more truly still, "If Christ be not raised . . . ye are yet in your sins . . . and we are, of all men, most miserable." He did indeed fill the world with confusion, and brought nothing but privation and earthly loss to the followers of the new religion, and it would be a strange sort of morality if it were to be held that all this could rightfully be accomplished by preaching the illusion of a fevered brain!

Nothing is more remarkable with this School of Scepticism than their Proteus-like habit of changing their front; no sooner are they dislodged from one position than they take up another, and when you think you have caught them on one or other horn of a dilemma—alas! vain thought, they escape under a new disguise.

There are some who hold that the Apostles neither believed nor taught the resurrection at all, but simply repeated the moral teachings of Christ; and that the Gospel narratives are superstitious legends.

We feel, in contemplating this theory, as if history were dissolving into cloudland, as if the solid earth were leaving our feet, and all things melting into primeval chaos; we feel as though we were confronted by the assertion that Alexander never conquered Persia, or fought with Darius,—that his very existence was doubtful; that Curtius and Arrian, Plutarch and Diodorus invented the story of his career, as Homer may have imagined the adventures of Ulysses, or Tennyson the "Idylls of the King"! But we dare not dismiss this last conceit with mere irony; we must probe it to the bottom and unmask its absurdity.

Two out of the four Gospels are professedly written by apostles, viz., Matthew and John; but as the authorship of the last is impugned by some modern sceptics, we will, for our present purpose, not insist upon it. The first Gospel has always been allowed to be the work of the apostle whose name it bears. But even that point we are willing to forego, for the purpose of this argument, and we will meet our opponents on their own ground, that the writers of the four Gospels are unknown. Their theory is, that those accounts are a mixture of truth and fable, and that all the miracles, and especially the resurrection, are creations of an age subsequent to the Apostolic. But the difficulty at once arises, how can the Gospels, and especially the first three, be the product of a late age, when we find them largely quoted by the earliest Church fathers—by men who flourished within a century to a century and a-half of the death of Christ? They were quoted as holy Scripture by men like Justin-Martyr and Irenæus, who take it for granted in their writings that they were the recognised code of the Christian Church. It is self-evident that the three first Gospels at least belonged to a very early age.

They must have been written, if not in the lifetime of the Apostles, at the very latest in the lifetime of those who succeeded the Apostles. This is a fact which it is impossible for men to deny who know anything of historical criticism. We can now measure the credibility of this theory, which imputes to the writers of those Gospels the fabrication of the story of the Resurrection, a story which, according to them, the Apostles never taught at all. We are to suppose that the whole Christian Church scattered round the shores of the Mediterranean, and formed by the personal teaching of the Apostles, and especially of St. Paul, should be unable to detect in the following generation so gross an imposition as this—that they should receive narratives as sacred, teach them as the Word of God, and make them the rule of the universal Church, which narratives were totally different from the oral teaching of the Apostles some thirty or forty before. Is it not preposterous to suppose that the teaching of the Apostles should be so entirely lost in their lifetime, that a fabulous version of it should gain ascendancy all over the Christian Church, and that the true

account should be so wholly lost that not a trace has come down to us? That is the consequence we must face if we are to suppose that the Apostles never taught the Resurrection of Christ nor the other miracles, and that these were invented by the mendacious writers of the four Gospels. But this is only one side of the case. The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul all testify to the truth of the Gospel narratives; and the genuineness of most of them has never been seriously called in question. Indeed many of the Epistles of Paul can be proved to be his by a chain of evidence as clear as the Æneid can be traced to Virgil or the Commentaries of the Conquest of Gaul to Julius Cæsar. It is perfectly clear from them, even if the four Gospels be put out of court, that the resurrection was taught by the Apostles, and was, indeed, the corner-stone of their edifice. We can hardly bring ourselves to suppose that any man of intelligence and moral sense can really believe that the companions and Apostles of Christ did not teach the doctrine of the Resurrection; and we have only noticed this theory because it has been hastily put forward to shelter men from believing

anything definite regarding the facts of the Christian religion.

It is, indeed, as certain as anything in the past can be, that the Apostles taught the Resurrection of our Saviour as a fact, which they were cognisant of by their bodily senses, and as sure of as they were of their own existence; and not only did the twelve witness this fact, but St. Paul affirms that five hundred brethren beheld the risen Lord, most of whom were still living at the time he wrote. Building upon this undoubted foundation, we hold that he who denies the Resurrection of our Lord denies a historical fact, resting upon indubitable evidence; nay, he does violence to his own moral nature, for he forces his mind into an unnatural posture, before he can extort from his understanding a verdict so opposed to the laws of evidence. We maintain that an unbeliever who has so warped his mind as to deny the Resurrection, after studying the subject in all its bearings, must have arrived at that point where the confines of truth and falsehood are lost, and the power of discerning moral evidence is fatally impaired.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST IN KEEPING WITH HIS CHARACTER AND CLAIMS.

WE now pass from the Resurrection of Christ to the miracles He is recorded to have wrought, and, supposing that the former is proved, we hold that the latter can readily be shown to follow as a natural sequence. The Resurrection of our Lord at once stamps Him as a being transcendently glorious: it does not in itself prove Him to be divine, because He was not the first or only one recorded in the Bible to have risen from the grave, but it puts God's stamp upon the truth of His teaching, and the validity of His claims; for who can suppose for a moment the Most High would have wrought so great a miracle on behalf of one whose teaching was untrue, or even partially true, or who laboured under an illusion as to his person and mission? Would not that be making Almighty

God an accessory to a scheme for duping mankind? The thing is revolting. If God suspended the fundamental laws of nature, and unbarred the gates of death for the sake of Him who claimed to be His only begotten and well-beloved Son, it was to ratify these claims, and demonstrate them for all time to be absolutely true; for it must be remembered that the fact of the resurrection stood in unique relation to Christ; He had staked His character, so to speak, upon that great event; He had repeatedly foretold it to His disciples, and spoken of it in connection with His Crucifixion as the supreme work of His life, and the accomplishment of the grand purpose of God, foretold in the Scriptures, for the redemption of mankind. Christ Himself submitted, so to speak, the genuineness of His work to this crucial test. Had He remained in the tomb, mankind would have known that one more fanatic had been exposed; but in His glorious resurrection and ascension to heaven the stamp of Divine authority was placed for all time upon the work and words of our Redeemer.

When this view of the Resurrection is once admitted into the mind, the miracles of Christ

appear the natural outcome of His work. They appear entirely in keeping with His person and character. Surely, if He was the Son of God in that transcendent sense He claimed—a sense so far above what any mere human being could aspire to, that the Jews founded upon it a charge of blasphemy, and adjudged Him to death on that account alone, then it would be most reasonable that He should show that power over nature which His disciples had a right to expect. And we find accordingly that Christ constantly appeals to His works on behalf of His Messiahship. His language was—"If ye believe not Me, believe My works," and this appeal sufficed for the common people, for they followed him in crowds, marvelling at the wonderful works He did, and acclaiming Him "the Son of David." The whole Gospel narrative becomes unintelligible without these miracles. It is impossible to believe that one brought up in the house of a carpenter till He was thirty years of age could in three short years have convulsed Palestine, and founded a new religion of such marvellous vitality, without miracles. Had He done so much merely by

delivering moral aphorisms, it would have been the greatest miracle the world ever saw!

Then, the miracles of Christ are unlike the creations of human fancy; they are not vain displays of power, like the legends of superstition, but are all wrought for healing and beneficent purposes. They are never obtruded merely to frighten bystanders, or even silence gainsayers; they are never associated with the semblance of boasting, or with any of those motives which mere human fancy draws upon to account for miracles; they fall with perfect appropriateness into the scheme of His life; they are like Christ, and like Christ only of all beings that have appeared upon this earth; and we deny that all the genius of man could have invented such a set of miracles as are recorded in the New Testament, or grouped them in such a harmonious manner around the person of our Redeemer. His miracles, like His sayings, are Christlike, and have no parallel in the history of mankind; and His whole personality is so unique that it is folly to talk of it as an emanation from the brains of His followers.

But we wish to call special attention to the fact that the miracles of Christ are inseparably connected with His sayings, and that it is impossible to reject the one and hold on to the other. His miracles are quite as credible as His sayings; and it is clear that, if the former are untrue, the latter must also be so. It is a common view of deists, that Christ simply taught men their duty towards God, keeping Himself in the background; but this is quite opposed to the Gospel narratives. We find in all of them that much of Christ's teaching related to Himself, to His person, His mission, and its results. He insists upon Himself being the promised Messiah, and makes the admission of His personal authority the touchstone of discipleship. He says to Peter, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" and when Peter replies, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," He answers, "Simon Barjona, flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven." In that most solemn description of the Last Judgment, given in the 25th chapter of Matthew, He describes Himself in the most striking language

as the Judge of mankind, and pronounces doom on every human being, according as they have done it unto the least of these His brethren. He uniformly assumes the right of forgiving men's sins, and reading their secret thoughts. He makes faith in Himself the absolute condition of salvation, and expressly forbids any attempt to approach the Father except through Him. "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." He describes Himself as the perfect likeness of the Father. He says to Philip, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and why sayest thou then, show us the Father?" In that solemn moment, when He stood before Caiaphas, with the shadow of the cross falling athwart His path, He abated not a jot of His claims; "nevertheless ye shall see the Son of man standing at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." When the last scene closes, and He ascends to His Father from Mount Olivet, His parting words were, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth; go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching

them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

This claim to supernatural powers runs through the whole of Christ's teaching, and yet it is combined in so marvellous a fashion with a life of humiliation, and so steady a refusal to use these powers for any purpose of self-aggrandisement, that we are constrained to say, with the Roman Centurion, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

It is, however, a fact—surprising though it be—that men are to be found who appear to have drunk into the Spirit of Christ, who yet reject the miracles of the New Testament, and, indeed, question the authenticity of the whole framework of Christianity. The hyper-refinement of our day has developed an extraordinary type of mind—a hybrid, so to speak, between reason and mysticism; and it would be unfair to deny that gleams of Divine light have reached the souls of some, from the glorious person of Christ, who yet question the truth of the Gospel narratives. But the great mistake they make—and many have fallen into it—is this: they hold that the Christian religion

may be universally taught in this mystical way, and that mankind may learn a purer faith by exploding its historical and dogmatic basis. That this is an entire delusion we have not the shadow of a doubt; and that it is held by a few high-minded men, who have imbibed many of the precepts of Christ, we attribute to the common mistake of judging of universal human nature by the phenomena of one's own mind. This mystical Christianity, which they hold, is only rendered possible by the atmosphere of genuine belief which surrounds them. Were it not that the historical facts of Christianity are lodged in the public mind, and supply the motives to the great bulk of the earnest Christian life that exists, it would not be possible for even these few men to live on the ethereal essence they have sublimed out of the system. They are quite unconsciously paying homage to the atmosphere of orthodox belief, which they inhale, despite their efforts to the contrary, and without which their visionary systems would crumble into dust. If they could succeed in demolishing the historic and doctrinal foundation of Christianity, and reduce it to that nebulous

substance they profess to revere, they would be astonished to find even their platform of belief slipping from under their feet; they would discover, when too late, that they had unchained the tempest; and having loosened the only hold that religion can have on common minds—viz., an undoubting belief in its truth, they would stand aghast to see the rush of wickedness that would fill the vacant ground. Their flimsy theories would be swept away like cobwebs; having "sown the wind they would reap the whirlwind." It is not impossible for a set of philosophic Deists to exist in the midst of a Christian community, holding the moral precepts of Christianity, and influenced powerfully by the ideal beauty of Christ; but it is quite impossible for their descendants to hold the same ground, if the common framework of belief were swept away. No ungodly man could reach Christian faith by the devious path they climbed. It is possible to begin by a simple faith, and end in philosophic abstractions; but it is contrary to experience to begin by abstractions and end in simple faith. The Encyclopedists, who preceded the French

Revolution, taught doctrines subversive of all authority, human and divine; but they clothed them in so graceful an attire, that no one, not even themselves, suspected the awful consequences they would lead to. Were they not sublime philosophers who could plant religion and morality on better foundations than priestcraft had done! So thought they, and so thought the shallow generation that applauded their wit; but when their destructive principles sunk into the minds of the common people, what a hell was let loose! Superstition, forsooth, was overthrown, but—horrid substitute!—a harlot was installed as goddess of reason; and from that day to this French intellectual society has drifted to and fro in the dreary sea of Atheism, ever putting forward new theories of religion, which follow each other like bubbles on the surface of a stream. It is well shown there how hopeless it is to construct a religion when once the roots of simple faith are cut off. Having destroyed belief in God's revelation, French philosophers may revolve in vicious circles to the end of time without discovering a substitute. They may denounce in bitterest language the vices

that corrupt the nation, but they will never reach the only true remedy—the conscience awakened to the voice of God; and regeneration, if it ever come to that unbelieving and dissolute race, must be on the old lines of "The Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone." We conclude our argument on miracles by observing that those who seek to discredit them, are trying to pull down one of the chief buttresses of the Christian religion; and we would address to them a warning, like that which Gamaliel gave to the Chief Priests of the Jews: "Refrain from this thing, and let it alone, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

CHAPTER IV.

ARGUMENT FOR CHRISTIANITY FROM THE GRANDEUR OF ITS HOPES.

A CONVINCING argument in favour of the Christian religion is *the incomparable grandeur of the hopes which it opens to mankind.* Alone, of all the shrines at which man has worshipped, does it afford a sure and blessed hope of immortality. The heathen religions had only dim forebodings of the future state; the life to come was rather a theme for poets than an influential belief; indeed, it had so weak a hold, even on philosophers, that the Scripture simply expresses the truth when it declares that "life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel." Till the Resurrection of Christ had unbarred the gates of death, there was no vital belief in the life to come among the Gentiles, and but a feeble one among the Jews. From that time forth the immortality of the soul has been an axiom

wherever the Gospel of Christ has been received. And how vastly superior to the pictures of human fancy is the Christian revelation of the future state! Compare the Elysian Fields of Virgil or the sensual Paradise of Mahomet with the New Jerusalem of revelation. In the first we have the Trojan heroes pursuing their former sports amid shady groves, and amusing themselves with horses and armour, the copies of what they did battle with on earth. The Mahomedan falls below even the Pagan ideal; for his Heaven is one of gross physical indulgence, where all the appetites of the body are gratified on an exaggerated scale. But hark what the Seer of Patmos beheld of the Christians' Home in Glory. "And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice out of Heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow or crying, neither shall there be any

more pain, for the former things are passed away." Again, "He carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God, and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper-stone, clear as crystal. . . . . And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it, and the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof, and the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it, and the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day, for there shall be no night there, and they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it, and there shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

Where shall we find, outside the book of inspiration, imagery so sublime as this? Where shall we find hopes so fitted to elevate the soul of man,

and carry it triumphantly across the dark river of death? The Christian religion alone of all others has stripped the charnel-house of its terrors, and enabled the believer to say, "O, death, where is thy sting? O, grave, where is thy victory?" Contrast with these joyful expectations the cold and feeble light which Deism casts upon the grave; it shuts out of view the Resurrection of Christ, for its system is complete without it; it bases its hopes of immortality upon the dim gropings after a future state which reason and the light of nature supply; but it has no comfort to offer the trembling soul about to depart, naked and solitary, into the presence of that Holy One whose eye cannot look upon iniquity; it has no Saviour to present to the burdened conscience, shrinking from the disclosure of all its past life to the Judge from whom nothing can be hid. It exhorts to a general trust in the mercy of God; but the soul wants something stronger to lean upon; it craves after the sure Word of God, and this is found nowhere except in Holy Writ. Weak and feeble are the best consolations that human philosophy can offer to the dying, compared with these weighty words

which inspired wisdom has placed on record. Nowhere can the value of our religion be tested better than at that supreme crisis; if it is worth anything it is a sheet-anchor then. Who ever heard of a dying Christian repenting of his religion; who ever knew of one regretting that he had loved Christ too much, and served Him too well! Can the same be said of the votaries of Deism? We have heard strange tales of the last hours of Voltaire, of Rousseau, of Tom Paine, and even of that cold-blooded sceptic, David Hume. We question if many opponents of Christianity, standing on the confines of eternity, have viewed their past life with satisfaction; we question if any, with their life to spend over again, would choose to have it the same. We are certain that many would gladly change lots with the dying Christian.

The fact is, Christianity comes in with Divine power just at the point where all forms of human religion break down. It faces boldly the mysteries connected with death, and gloriously solves them. Other religions are confounded at the dreary contrast between the goodness of God and the painful dissolution of the creatures He has made.

They cannot explain it on their theories of universal benevolence; but the Bible steps in and tells the story of man's fall and God's remedy. It shows us the holiness of God in such dazzling purity that human corruption appears doubly dark, and the necessity is made plain of a release from this body of sin and death, in order that "this corruptible may put on incorruption and this mortal immortality."

We do not deny that there are mysteries even in the Bible account of man's state and destiny; but they are less, far less than those which any form of human philosophy must contend with. The Bible does not create these difficulties; they existed antecedent to it, and baffled all the wisdom of antiquity. The Bible aids us vastly in their solution, but it does not wholly remove them. Nor is this to be wondered at. The infinite mind of God, as we already remarked, can only be revealed in part to the feeble comprehension of finite man. We only "see through a glass darkly." The Bible illumines the point of contact between God and man; but the lines that proceed from this point stretch into unknown regions, and as God has

revealed nothing merely to satisfy curiosity, we soon lose ourselves when we attempt to reason on those deep subjects which do not directly concern us. That evil should be permitted to exist at all is an insoluble mystery. The Bible does not unravel it, and it is no discredit to it that it does not make the attempt. But it shows how it may be got rid of, so far as each individual soul is concerned; and the remainder of the mystery we must leave to that time when "we shall see face to face;" and we may feel sure that then there will be ample ground for that adoring song with which the great multitude surround the throne, "who have come out of all nations and kindreds, and people and tongues, and who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

A great part of the difficulties that surround the Christian revelation disappears when the principle of faith is allowed its proper place in the heart. Rationalism rebels against this. How can I believe what I cannot understand? is its cry. It takes up a combative position from the very first, and allows no truth to enter the spiritual faculties that has not first passed the narrow gateway of man's

finite reason. But God addresses Himself directly to man's spiritual nature. He knows that it can respond directly, and can verify the truth of what He says by tests sufficient for the real requirements of our nature. God does not seek in the Bible to do violence to our rational constitution. It is a false faith that seeks to crush the clear verdict of reason; and He who created the human mind is careful not to hurt its powers when He appeals to our spiritual nature; but still the truth is clearly stated in the Bible that "The natural man knoweth not the things of the Spirit of God, nor can know them, because they are spiritually discerned," and for this reason it is vain to expect to explain away every difficulty that mere human reason may start against the Christian scheme. This permanent cause of unbelief resides in the carnal mind of man, and often the only answer that can be given to its questionings is, "Thus saith the Lord." This does not dispense us from seeking to remove all obstacles that will yield to learning and research; but it will guard against the illusion that all cavils will be silenced, or even all honest difficulties set at rest by any explanations it lies in the power of

the Christian apologist to render. The last and final appeal of Christianity is to the soul enlightened by the Spirit of God; and we make bold to say that no one who has searched the Scriptures in devout submission to the Divine will, has failed to find them "given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

PART III.

INJURIOUS EFFECT OF TEACHING CHRISTIANITY IN TOO THEOLOGICAL A STYLE, ESPECIALLY TO THE YOUNG.

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WE feel that we cannot conclude these remarks on the evidences of Christianity, without referring to a subject that is closely connected with it, and which is responsible, we fear, for some of the unbelief of the present day—we mean the over-exacting claims of orthodox theology. The object of our previous remarks has been to show the credibility of the Christian religion as a whole, but we have carefully avoided mixing it up with the defence of particular doctrinal schools. We believe the great historical facts of Christianity and its leading lines of truth to be unassailable; but we dare not say so much of the systems of theology that have been founded

upon it. We fear that its defences have been weakened by incorporating with its foundation-truths the inferences drawn from them by metaphysical divines, and insisting on the reception of all alike as equally essential. We have already pointed out how a gradual development of Divine truth was needed to meet the growing capacity of the human soul; and we wish now to define more exactly the error into which the Church has often fallen, of refusing to recognise this development and provide for it, and the stimulus it has thereby given to unbelief. Let us illustrate this by referring to a method too often adopted in teaching young children Divine truth. The most elaborate systems of Divinity are condensed into catechisms, and those great truths which are pictorially as well as doctrinally represented in the Scriptures are rigorously defined by a dry verbal logic, and in this highly abstract form are presented to the budding mind of youth. There is no withholding of the deeper and more mysterious doctrines till the ripened intellect can grapple with them; but the highest conceptions of an Augustine or a Calvin regarding the Divine counsels and procedure are

melted down into dry formulas, and injected into the tender mind of a child. Nothing, we believe, can be more opposed to God's method of education; and the melancholy result is often seen in after-life of a deep-rooted aversion to all religion, and not unfrequently a corroding scepticism. It has often struck us that the absurdity of this mode of teaching religion to children is demonstrated by analogies from other departments of knowledge. Who would think, in teaching arithmetic to a child, of initiating him into the mysteries of the cube root at the same time he was learning the multiplication table? Who would think of making him lay aside his primer to analyse a play of Shakespeare? Who would think of accompanying the first lessons on astronomy by a thesis on spectrum analysis? The absurdity of this mode of teaching needs only to be stated in order to be perceived; but it is not unfrequently applied in the profound regions of theology. The young child is required not merely to learn that God is angry with sin, and that Christ has died to save sinners, but that in the eternal counsels of God a covenant has been entered into to save the elect. The two first of these truths

the child can understand in a measure, and they can be illustrated copiously by the profuse imagery of Scripture, but the last can by no possibility be explained. It lies far away from all the avenues by which ideas can enter the mind of a child, and any attempt to explain it would shock its immature conscience rather than enlighten it. Before the mind can receive vitally the higher truths of revelation a long ladder must be climbed; but the child has not climbed the ladder, and till he has done so these high doctrines are a meaningless jargon of words; nay, they are worse, for they act like a crude, undigested mass on the stomach, interfering with the healthy assimilation of the simple diet the child is able to digest. The habit of teaching the arcana of theology to youth is fraught with this further evil;—it connects in the mind of a child the idea of mystery and unreality with religion, and aids him to do that which fallen man is too prone to do, viz., to divorce religion from practical duty. Accustomed from early youth to the infliction of nauseous doses of scholastic theology, for him devoid of all meaning, and touching neither heart nor conscience, the conviction takes deep root that

religion is an unsufferable bondage; and if the spirit of God does not quicken this *caput mortuum*, there is terrible danger that dark unbelief will enter the soul at a later period of life. It cannot be too often remembered that religious dogmas are only valuable as they affect the heart and conscience, and it is indispensable in the teaching of the young to advance views of truth that can strike living roots into the soul. The radical mistake that has led to the neglect of this is the false view that every truth made known by God is equally necessary to be known by every human being at all stages of his growth. Many Christians cannot conceive that the law of development holds good of the spiritual life. It is sufficient for them that a truth is in the Bible, or that they think it is there, and it must be taught to all alike, young and old, ignorant and learned; for it is God's truth, and it were wrong to withhold it. Now we would call attention to Christ's method of teaching the ignorant multitudes who thronged round Him. He spoke to them not in the language of theology, but in parables, "according as they were able to bear it." He threw out seeds of Divine truth, clothed in the

habiliments of common life; and none that heard could fail to carry away some great lessons, though these lessons were often far too general in their character to fit into any theological groove. The Great Teacher knew well that the blade must appear before the full corn in the ear, and that the child must have milk before the strong man could have meat. It is notable how rarely Christ touches upon the higher mysteries of the kingdom of God in addressing the common people, and even to His disciples He was sparing in communicating deep truths. He was patient of their ignorance and carnal apprehension, and gave them "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." Our Divines often fail to realise how simple and elementary was the knowledge of truth entertained by some of those to whom Christ addressed the gracious words, "Son, daughter, thy sins be forgiven thee." What could the poor sinner-woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head have known of the scheme of redemption? Had she ever pondered God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, or rightly divided the line

between "free grace" and "good works?" No one can suppose so who reads the Bible in a natural manner. She, and many such as she, could have known little of Christ in His higher relations to humanity, but she felt there was a purity in that holy Being which convicted her of sin, and a tenderness which assured her of forgiveness; and the germs of faith sprang up in her soul, so that Jesus could extend to her as full a salvation as if she had possessed the knowledge of Paul. But it may be urged, Was it not right that this poor woman should forthwith be instructed in all the mysteries of the Kingdom? We much doubt it. We see no trace of such hasty instruction on the part of Christ. He was content to be three years with His disciples before He had made it plain to them that He must die and rise again; and those deeper views of the Kingdom of God which were expounded by Paul, He scarcely touched upon at all during His life. Had it been essential that all these things should have been revealed at once, He who knew all truth would not have delayed their announcement; but it was not essential. The understanding of his disciples had to ripen

and their hearts to be disciplined by many trials before the full glories of Christ's Spiritual Kingdom could be apprehended by them. Now there always are and always will be many Christians whose spiritual life is in the embryonic state; and the teachers of religion must seek to feed them with "milk," and not with "strong meat," and they must be content to bear with great crudeness of thought, and not expect full-fledged orthodoxy while they are in this infantine stage. But this is not all. Many true believers, whether from weakness of understanding or want of theological aptitude, never can come to a competent acquaintance with the whole scheme of Christian doctrine. Are we, then, to suppose that their incomplete theology is any barrier to fellowship with God? Nay, verily, there may exist the most utter devotion to the Saviour, the most unwearied self-denial for His sake, without the knowledge of many things that are deemed essential in all schools of theology. No one who has taken the trouble of piercing beneath the surface and finding out what are the vital forces in the life of humble believers but must be surprised to discover how holy may be the life,

and how defective the creed. Now what we hold is, that God, the creator of the human mind, is satisfied with this life. He expects nothing more. He has only given one talent, not ten; and, if that talent is doubled, the increase is as pleasing to Him as when the ten are converted into twenty. But there are many Christians who do not hold this view in regard to matters of doctrine. They think that all who come short of the full measure of Divine truth are *ipso facto* failing in their duty to God. They insist upon their "holding" all the truth they themselves have received; and if they decline, then they are to be lopped off as unsound branches. We are convinced that there is a great error in this. It was not thus that Christianity was first taught to the world, and it is not thus that it will ever address itself to the lower stratum of mind. But the explanation is not far to seek. Christianity has for eighteen hundred years been brooded over by the loftiest minds, and these have combined it with the deepest research into morals and metaphysics, and hence has emerged a theology which appeals to the highest form of human intellect. Augustine

formulated some views of Divine truth, which had scarcely presented themselves to the simpler minds of the earlier Fathers; and these again passed into the subtle brain of Calvin, and emerged as the most profound and logical system of theology the world has known. In a large part of Christendom the Bible is only approached through the avenue of these preconceptions. The clergy are first indoctrinated with this abstruse system, and then taught to interpret Scripture in harmony with it; and through them the people are educated to the same abnormal method of approaching Bible truth. One result of this is that doctrinal teaching bulks disproportionately large in the ministrations of the pulpit, and there arises the dangerous habit of holding a theology in excess of the truths apprehended experimentally: instead of being content to let the Christian consciousness expand gradually, and assimilate doctrine after doctrine, there is an impatience to have the complete system lodged in the brain. This state of affairs gives great advantages to the infidel. He attacks an ordinary believer, and soon forces him to admit that

much of his professed belief is mere mental lumber; and there is great danger that when this is discovered the pure ore will be parted with as well as the dross. The simple believer who holds vitally a few great truths,—as a Primitive Methodist, for example, may do,—is less in danger of being staggered by a sceptic than the man who has been loaded with the full complement of doctrines, but has not digested a large part of them.

We do not wish to be misunderstood, however. We desire not to cast discredit on the giant intellects in times past who have yoked theology and philosophy together, who have poured over the page of inspiration till they have soared to the seventh heaven and seen things unutterable. Next to the Apostles themselves, no man has shaped Christian thought in all time like Augustine, and this royal prerogative he holds in virtue of his peerless gifts. Those minds in which a deep yearning after high truth is coupled with faith in God's revelation, will, from the very necessity of their being, drink at the streams of this prince of theologians; and it is both natural and right

that the highest attainments which have been reached in the past should be preserved for the benefit of future generations. The error is not in climbing to the top of Jacob's ladder and seeing a vision of angels, but in thinking that the mass of simple believers should get to the top of the ladder and see the vision as well.

We think it is of vital importance that the Church of Christ—which comprehends all true believers, in whatever communion they may be found—should bear in mind that much variety and even crudeness of opinion are inevitable where human minds come honestly into contact with the Bible. Let them not try to override what is obviously a divine appointment, for had the Author of the Book thought it necessary that all Christians should think alike, He would surely have provided them with a text-book severely logical in arrangement and most exact in its use of language. But no one can say this of the Bible whose eyes are not blinded by prejudice; while there is a grand moral unity underlying it, there are yet such varieties of religious expression that uniformity is impossible, except at the expense of individual

conviction; and we believe that the attempts of good men to reconcile all apparent discrepancies in the sacred volume have injured its real influence and played into the hands of the infidel. Who that is a devout reader of Scripture, but must feel that many of its sayings pass beyond the bounds of all creeds, and point upwards into an empyrean where the logical faculty cannot follow? Who but constantly feels that the breadth and roominess of Scripture language transcend the hard limits of catechisms, while the blending of truths into one another is so subtle a process that no delicacy of theological definition can do justice to it? The most complete catechism ever written presents a poor reflex of the many-coloured, many-sided representation of truth we have in God's book. Who is there but feels that no catechism can do complete justice to two such rival statements as these:—"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. ii. 8, 9); and, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James ii. 24)? Or to take another instance, "If we say that we have

no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8); and "Whosoever abideth in Him (Christ) sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him" (1 John iii. 6). Examples of this kind might be multiplied indefinitely. Many statements are made that are irreconcilable according to mere grammatical construction. The Bible has a wonderful boldness of expression; it says the strongest things without reference to the trouble it may give to theologians; it abounds with statements which the unprejudiced reader feels will not square exactly with any creed, and yet sees to have a deep truth in them. And this peculiarity of the Bible has not been sufficiently recognised, else there would have been less anxiety about uniform doctrinal expression. The fact is, any one who, in the interest of a supposed orthodoxy, confines himself to a dry uniform way of stating divine truth, will deprive his hearers of much of that spiritual food which is stored up for them in the Bible; he will narrow his own sympathies and get colder and harder notions of the Divine procedure. Besides that, he will address himself only to one class of his hearers, for

many will be repelled or disheartened by his want of sympathy with their mental or moral requirements. The true "Master in Israel" is like the good householder who can "bring out of his treasures things new and old," who is not afraid to use the copious language and metaphor of Scripture, because, forsooth! some of the expressions cannot be harmonised with his theological system. We believe teaching of that kind carries conviction to all hearers, and leaves no foothold for scepticism. We believe if it were more common there would be fewer defections from the faith of our forefathers.

But some one will say—Are we, then, to have no theology? Are the clergy no longer to be instructed in sound systems of doctrine, and to teach these to the laity? Is every one to give forth his loose and hasty impressions of what the Bible teaches, regardless of orthodoxy? By no means. Theology has its proper province: it is the necessary offspring of the classifying and systematising faculty in the human mind, and it is impossible for a powerful understanding to meditate deeply on Holy Scripture without framing a

theology. The Church of Christ, in doing so, is meeting an unappeasable demand of human nature, and there must be in all ages great theologians to minister to that demand. We go further, and say that there are in the Bible materials for a grand theology; but it must be a roomy one, else it will do injustice to its original. What we have attempted to set forth is not the use but the abuse of theology; it is the habit of importing it into departments where elementary teaching is all that is wanted. By all means lay its foundations as deep as possible, and build the superstructure as high as possible, but do not forget that "out of the mouth of *babes* and *sucklings* God hath perfected praise," and that Christ hath said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto *babes*."

But we must draw our remarks to a close. Let nought we have said in this last chapter be held to justify a state of doubt and indecision. Let it not be thought that we excuse those who stand idle at the portals of Christ's temple and will

not enter in; we have put in a plea for liberty, not for license; we are willing to tolerate divergences of thought so long as there is a unity in essentials, but we cannot admit the excuse that Christianity itself is too doubtful to allow of certainty. There is moral certainty of the truth of our religion, and all who are "willing to do the will of the Father shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." We cannot and do not believe that any earnest soul, anxious to know God's truth, and willing to obey it as well as know it, can long remain in doubt as to the verity of the Christian religion; he may have difficulties at first; he may be unable to adopt any theory of inspiration or any scheme of doctrine; but the grand outlines of the faith will surely reveal themselves to him. At first he may "see men as trees walking," like the blind man who was healed by Christ, and he may refuse to credit you when you tell him that these men are no larger of stature than himself; but his optical delusions will subside as he gets accustomed to the exercise of spiritual eyesight. The harmony and due proportion of Divine truths will make themselves manifest; a thousand subtle links of

connection will unfold themselves; arguments innumerable for the Divineness of our religion will crowd in upon his mind, and he will discover that gradually, and almost unknown to himself, he is falling into line with the "noble army of martyrs" who, in all ages, have borne witness to "the faith once delivered to the saints." Let no one think there is anything ennobling in doubt. List not to the poet when he sings, "There is more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half their creeds." Doubt is an enfeebling thing; it paralyses healthy action; it benumbs the soul and deadens the conscience; it puts a man out of harmony with the laws of the universe; all other created things have a distinct aim impressed upon them. Is man alone to be in darkness about his destiny? Surely no. "He who hath caused the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light, but

if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

Brethren, let us have the Light of Life shining into our hearts, and we shall no longer be troubled with doubts about the credibility of the Christian faith.

PART IV.

REMARKS ON THE SHORTER CATECHISM, AND GENERALLY ON THE OVER-EXACTNESS OF THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS.

PART IV.

(*SUPPLEMENTARY.*)

REMARKS ON THE SHORTER CATECHISM,

AND GENERALLY ON THE OVER-EXACTNESS OF THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS.

WE are well aware that the views put forward in the concluding portion of these remarks will not be acceptable to all Christians; the habit of teaching Catechisms to children is too deeply rooted to be easily shaken, and many of the most pious people having approached divine truth through this avenue themselves, cannot conceive of anything objectionable in the system. In the northern part of this island the belief in the efficacy of catechetical teaching is especially strong, and by many godly persons there, the "Shorter Catechism" of the

Westminister Assembly is valued almost as highly as the Bible itself.

Now—to avoid misconception—we wish to state clearly the position we take up in respect of that celebrated standard.

We readily admit that, as an epitome of doctrine, it is one of the best ever compiled; its definitions are models of philosophical precision, and, upon the whole, reflect the teaching of Scripture as closely as any mere theological summary can be expected to do; nor is it without use in giving definite expression to the religious thought of those who are trained in the school of Christian experience, but from its very nature it is entirely beyond the comprehension of young children, and indeed of many adults. We do not mean to allege that there is nothing in it they can understand; there is, of course, a great deal that, with proper explanation, can be made both profitable and intelligible even to children, but what we do assert is, that its mode of presenting truth is repellant to the youthful mind, and likely to give at the outset of life a distaste to religion.

Nothing is more difficult for the majority of

human beings than to go out of themselves, and view matters as they appear to others on a different plane of thought; the teachers of Catechisms, from long use of theological phrases, come to think them as simple and obvious as the names of objects in daily use; but nothing is more certain than that terms such as "Justification," "Adoption," "Sanctification," "Effectual Calling," "Original Sin," and many others which form the staple of Catechisms, convey either no idea at all to a child, or at best so vague and cloudy a one that it only "darkens counsel by words without knowledge." The fundamental idea of a Catechism, at least of such a one as that prescribed by the Westminister Assembly of Divines, is at variance with the organic laws of the human mind; it presents divine truth in the most *abstract* form possible, and expects the budding intellect to assimilate it in that shape, and then apply it to practical use. The human mind learns truth in just the opposite way; it begins by the *concrete*, and rises to the *abstract;* it begins by noticing particulars, and thence it slowly and painfully ascends to generals.

A child, before it forms a conception of good-

ness in the abstract, must have observed many good deeds in actual life; it must have seen a person acting out the principle in a thousand ways, before it can disembody the idea, and hold it in the mind as an abstract conception. In the recognition of this truth lay the marvellous wisdom and beauty of Christ's teaching. He avoids abstractions, and brings home divine principles to the dull understandings of men, by acting them in deeds of mercy and painting them in parables. When asked by the Pharisee, "Who is my neighbour?" He did not say oracularly, "Humanity is of one blood," but replied by telling the story of the Samaritan who fell among thieves; and the dullest comprehension could not fail to draw the lesson He intended. When He wished to exhibit the tenderness of God to the repenting sinner, He told the matchless parable of the Prodigal Son. We venture to say that these two illuminated pictures by our Lord convey more vivid conceptions to a child of God's love to us and our duty to man than all the questions and answers in the Shorter Catechism put together.

We are willing to select as a crucial test of

the truth of our theory the celebrated question, "What is God?" The child has to reply as follows:—"God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." This definition is justly admired as being an excellent compendium of what the Bible teaches on the loftiest subject of human thought; but we contend that it presents a mere blank to the mind of a young child, and to many besides, who are not children; the conceptions are so highly abstract that we venture to say centuries of Christian thought must have elapsed before they could have been formulated. People who do not reflect on mental phenomena—and they are many—are apt to think that nothing can be simpler, and multitudes have repeated the words in question a thousand times without ever attaching to them any distinct idea, who yet would resent the imputation of ignorance as a calumny. But let us reflect on what is requisite to understand this definition. First of all we must know what is meant by "a Spirit," an idea than which nothing can be more alien to the experience of a child;

he draws his first conceptions entirely from sensible objects; his stock of ideas is derived from seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, &c.; the idea of disembodied existence is unintelligible, and probably the first impression he gets of the world of spirits is from ghost stories. If God was defined to him as a *person*, he might have some chance of forming a true conception, but theological propriety forbids this; nor is it thought sufficient to answer him as Christ answered Philip when he wished to see the Father, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

But grant that this initial difficulty is got over, we are next confronted with that indefinite term "infinite," a word to which we venture to assert not one grown person in a thousand attaches any clear notion. The term "eternal," however plain it may seem from familiar use, is also far removed from a child's modes of thinking, though it is possible to convey some glimmering of its sense, which cannot be said of the term "infinite." Then comes the word "unchangeable," about which we would remark that God in the Old Testament is constantly represented as "repenting," and changing His mind.

He resolves to destroy Israel, but relents at the prayer of Moses. He commissions Jonah to declare to Nineveh that yet forty days and it should be overthrown; but on its humbling itself we read, "And God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not." We do not argue from this that the Catechism is wrong in declaring God as unchangeable in His essential attributes, but we wish to show how differently the Bible addresses the childhood of the world; it did not wish to convey the idea of an inflexible uniformity of procedure, nor should we to the children of to-day. Then that very quintessence of abstraction, "Being," is presented to the child's mind. We may say of it what we said of "infinite," that it represents an idea which almost transcends the finite reason of man. Certainly very few adults, much less children, could translate it into the language of common life. The terms expressing the remainder of the Divine attributes, though not so far removed from a child's comprehension, do notwithstanding very faintly adumbrate the corresponding properties in the character of God. But few young children can form

distinct conceptions of what wisdom, holiness, justice, &c., mean; they can be brought to understand what a wise, a good, or a just man is, and thereby they may learn slowly to attach those ideas to God; but we believe that a careful study of the Life of our Lord will give an immensely clearer view of the Divine character than all the theological definitions that ever were framed; and till children are thus taught to conceive of their Heavenly Father, all attempts to define verbally the mystery of the Godhead is but "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

We will take two other questions of the Shorter Catechism to illustrate our meaning. The first, "What are the decrees of God?" The child answers, "The decrees of God are His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass." In this definition we have the basis of the Calvinistic system, and a large part of the doctrine of the Catechism necessarily flows from it.

We object *in toto* to harass the mind and conscience of a child with this terrible per-

plexity of the Divine decrees. We nowhere find these decrees thus isolated in the Scriptures, and treated as abstract principles: we there see God acting in various relations to the universe, and in some cases His action is ascribed to His eternal purpose; but the general impression left on the mind from reading the Bible is something wholly different from that hard fatalism suggested by the expression "Divine decrees." God is constantly represented as adapting Himself to the moral requirements of man; He pronounces a doom on the ungodly, but, when they repent, the doom is averted; He promises blessings, but revokes them if the implied conditions are not fulfilled; His government is ever represented as plastic and reasonable, inflexible only in those eternal principles of rectitude which lie at its foundation, but wisely adapting itself to the varying requirements of humanity. The term "decrees of God" is fitted to convey the impression of certain arbitrary rules, laid down by the Governor of the universe before the dawn of creation, by which He is inexorably bound—an idea, we venture to say, most repugnant to

the general scope of the Bible. Now, we are quite aware that theological subtlety can find a loophole of escape from this charge. The Westminster divines did not mean to inculcate fatalism, and in some high metaphysical sense the use of the objectionable words may be defended, but we argue that these subtleties cannot be explained to a child; and if it reflects at all, the effect cannot but be a dreary impression of harshness and rigidity in the government of God. Further, it suggests to its mind a host of insoluble problems, such as the responsibility of God for the evil that is in the world; for if *all things* are "fore-ordained" by Him, may not the last crime of which the child has heard be in some sense attributed to Him? The Catechism gives none of the qualifications necessary to the statement of this truth—qualifications with which the Bible abounds: and indeed this is the inherent defect of all summaries of Biblical truth; they isolate statements from the context with which they are surrounded in the Scriptures, they take them out of the framework in which they are placed, and the result is that they often

appear in a totally different light; and we think that the "question" we are analysing supplies a forcible illustration of this. But to proceed, we shall suppose, for the sake of argument, that the child takes some meaning out of the words, "His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will;" but what of the motive for which God is said to issue those immutable decrees, which is "for His own glory"? Now, we grant that this is the loftiest definition which Scripture furnishes of the final aim of the Divine Government, and when the Christian consciousness has fully expanded, it can embrace this crowning doctrine with cordial acquiescence; but to the mind of a child it is incomprehensible, or, what is worse, it leads to dark ideas of God; He seems to be doing everything to gratify Himself; He appears the personification of selfishness. The child is told that he must not regard himself only, but consider the happiness of others, and yet he is taught that God only regards Himself in arranging the affairs of the world. The child cannot see, nor can any ignorant person understand, how the glory of God comprehends the

highest welfare of all His creatures; that is a truth which slowly dawns on the mind as it rises to a high elevation in the knowledge of Divine things, and therefore we hold that this lofty abstraction is practically a falsehood if taught at the threshold of life. We cannot too often reiterate that there are stages in the communication of Divine truth, and that an intelligent regard must be paid to them if the teaching is to be truly profitable.

The last "question" we will advert to, is that very important one, "What is Justification?" "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."

Here we are brought face to face with one of the most abstruse of all the doctrines of Scripture, "the imputed righteousness of Christ," a doctrine which almost transcends human understanding, and which theologians even of the orthodox school have interpreted in a variety of ways. We cannot conceive anything more bewildering

to a child. No explanation founded on human analogies will aid us, for it is a Divine mystery, and only capable of being apprehended by a ripe Christian. We hold that it is scarcely possible for a little child to understand *righteousness*, not to speak of imputed righteousness. Hardly any word is more difficult to translate into common language; let those who think it easy, find an exact synonym for the term as used by Paul in the third chapter of Romans. We question if they will find one in the English language. To understand it aright requires a long education in the ethics of Christianity; indeed it may be said the Apostle Paul himself was learning more and more of the "righteousness of God" up to his last hour on earth. Certain it is, that when he was converted, on the way to Damascus, he knew little of its meaning, and probably not less than thirty years' growth in Divine knowledge was necessary before he could enunciate those deep mysteries contained in that most difficult portion of Holy Writ, the Epistle to the Romans; and yet the highest abstractions of that Epistle are selected as fit subjects to be taught the young

child at the beginning of life. Hardly any of the simple sayings of our Lord are contained in the Shorter Catechism, none of those beautiful discourses expressly designed for beginners, none of those animated pictures where the Divine nature shines forth with a radiance which the dullest intellect cannot but see; but the most abstruse parts of Scripture are ransacked for the most abstract views of the Divine procedure which the mind of man can contain! If any one was to be asked at first sight what part of the Bible contained the kernel of Christianity, surely he would say, The four Gospels. In them we have recorded all that we know of the life of our Lord. Surely if any words are precious, it is those that proceeded from the lips of Him who "spake as never man spake." Surely if any actions are to teach us what manner of life is agreeable to God, it is the deeds of mercy which flowed from Him who came "not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." But the Gospels might be blotted out of the Bible, and the Shorter Catechism would stand complete; it is not indebted to them for its doctrines. For the most part, the sayings of

Christ are not packed into the narrow compass that suits theological propositions; nor does He use that abstract language which is demanded by the exigencies of metaphysics. In His discourses He kept constantly before Him the mental calibre of the people He addressed; He clothed Divine truth in parables which would interest the dullest understanding, and was content to let it ferment there till their spiritual faculties were quickened and fitted for higher nutriment. Where do we see Him asking little children to define wherein the act of Justification consists? When they are brought to Him, He lays His hands on them and blesses them, and says, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven;" but He does not instruct them that they are "children of wrath," lying under the "curse of God," on account of Adam's transgression, and that those of them only who were "predestined to eternal life" of the "mere good pleasure of God" would obtain salvation, in virtue of the "perfect obedience" and "imputed righteousness" of the "second Adam!" Does not one instinctively shrink from such a caricature of our blessed Saviour. Had He so lived and walked

among us, could the little ones of humanity have pressed around Him for blessings—could sinful men have believed that He was a "high priest who could be touched with the feeling of our infirmities"—nay, could they believe that He knew the human heart at all, when He talked in language so unintelligible to His hearers? Had the Lord Jesus thought it necessary that through all time the youth of Christendom should make their acquaintance with His Gospel by that method, so dear to theologians, surely He would have set us an example—surely He would have given some specimen-lessons! Yet not a trace do we see of any such intention on His part; but one set form of words does He leave for use behind Him, viz., the Lord's Prayer, and in it He carefully eschews all the knotty questions of theology. If Christ be our examplar, as He is so often represented to be, why not borrow a leaf from His style of teaching?

But it will be replied that during His life the mystery of redemption was not fully unfolded, and could not be systematically taught; that in the Epistles we have the completed doctrine, which we

must use for the instruction of youth. In this there is a measure of truth. The results of Christ's death were only expounded in full by the Apostles, who were Divinely commissioned to spread the Gospel; and we admit that, in teaching children, their exposition of doctrine is not to be shut out of view. But we must remember that they wrote to believers in Christ—to those who had passed the threshold of Christian experience; and the deeper portions of the teachings of Paul were elicited by controversies in the Church, fomented by heretics and Judaising Christians. Thus was he led on in his Epistles to unfold systematically views of truth which it is highly probable were dwelt upon but lightly in his oral teaching. Certainly the specimens we have in "the Acts" of the oral addresses of the Apostles are wonderfully simple; they deal chiefly with historical facts: that Christ died for our sins, and that He rose again, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins were preached in His name, formed the staple of their discourses. It will be said that these truths impinge on all sides upon mysteries. So they do; but it is not needful to pull these mysteries out of the

darkness and thrust them upon a child long before his understanding can cope with them. We are satisfied that Paul and Peter never so taught children. We see them often in contact with grown children, but they never so catechised them, nor do they instruct their converts to compile manuals of theology for the children of the future.

Another point deserves to be remarked in connection with the doctrinal teaching of the Apostles. It is seldom introduced as a distinct thesis; it is usually occasioned by some incident in practical life, on which the writer is commenting. For instance, Paul's exposition of the design of the Lord's Supper in the 11th chapter of 1 Corinthians, is introduced by a rebuke to the Christians at Corinth for the disorderly way in which they met together "to break bread." His wonderful discourse on the Resurrection, in the 15th chapter, is caused by his denouncing those false teachers who alleged that it was past already. Even that massive exposition of doctrine in Romans is drawn forth apparently by the error of Judaising Christians, who still sought justification by the "deeds of the law;" at all events, Paul has constantly in view in that

Epistle the legal teaching of the Jews, and aims to controvert it. No one can examine the style of Scripture teaching narrowly, without remarking how constantly doctrine is allied to practice; mere disquisitions on theology, apart from practical life, seem to be eschewed as if of express purpose. The Apostle takes up his pen to write to a community of believers; he sees some beautiful traits in their character, and commends them for these, exhorting them to beware of falling, and incidentally pointing out how the perfection of their life flows out of the eternal purpose of a gracious God. He then recollects certain faults that have crept in among them; and this leads him to warn them both of the temptations of the world and of the theological errors that lead to laxness of life. And then he goes on in a discursive manner, mixing up simple observations about common duties with profound allusions to Divine mysteries in a way most unlike modern systems of theology. As he travels along the road he digresses to pluck a flower on this side, to root out a weed on that, to tarry on some eminence to survey the beauties of the spiritual landscape, while anon he plunges into

some jungle of antinomian heresy, and hews a way through the rank undergrowth. What is the moral of this unsystematic teaching? Has it no lesson for us? Was the Apostle not Divinely guided when he mixed ethics and divinity in this curious amalgam? We think he was; and we think the *method* of teaching Divine Truth needs to be learned from the Bible no less than the *matter*. The great principle that explains the discursive and apparently desultory teaching of doctrine in the Bible, is just the fact that the human mind is far better fitted to learn truth in the concrete than the abstract; for one mind that has a readiness to imbibe it under the latter form, there are ten thousand that prefer it under the former. For one person that can apprehend the Divine essence by means of abstruse definitions, there are multitudes who can only learn it by the vivid pictures presented in the life of Christ; for one that can apprehend metaphysically the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ, there are thousands who can feel the force of the heavenly vision where the great multitude who surround the throne are clothed in white robes which "they have washed

in the blood of the Lamb." For most persons religious truths have no existence except as clothed in living forms; they must be attached to sensible images to find admittance to their heart. They must picture Christ weeping over the grave of Lazarus before they can believe in His compassionate heart; they must behold Him absolving the woman who was a sinner, before they will receive the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. No law of the human mind deserves to be more studied than this, by all who wish to be teachers of the heart, and mere manuals of theology, from the very necessity of the case, leave it wholly out of account. The preacher who cannot expound doctrines so as to yoke them with daily life knows only half his duty. If he cannot make them live in the bosoms of his hearers, he may well suspect that they are mere creatures of his brain. That preaching which rests merely on high doctrine, which has never been fused in the crucible of love, or quickened by the warm sympathy of Christian experience, will only produce orthodox deadness.

But there is another weighty objection we have to teaching doctrine in a purely abstract form: it

fails to set it forth *truly*. This is a serious charge, and we must justify it. We hold that religious truth, and indeed we might extend the remark to all truth, is only rightly taught when it leaves on the mind of the learner the same impression it makes on the mind of the teacher. A picture must be made, so to speak, on the mirror of the soul of him who hears, reflecting in miniature the image in the soul of him who speaks. We dispute that mere theological definitions can ever effect this. It is impossible to tell what impression these abstractions make on the mind of a child; probably in most cases a mere blotch; at the best merely a dim, distorted picture of the original, nor in the nature of things can it be otherwise; nay, we are willing to leave the realm of childhood altogether, and transfer our argument to the domain of manhood; and we assert that Divine truth cannot be truly represented to the human mind at all, except in the mixed and concrete form in which it is shadowed forth in Scripture. All the doctrines of the Bible are in some sense complementary of each other; they are all subject to numerous qualifications, and are

very differently stated when viewed from different standpoints. Human nature is sometimes contemplated from God's point of view, and expressions are used which are far from true of it when contemplated from man's. There is hardly a doctrine of Scripture which can be isolated from the rest and stated completely as a detached truth: as well could the nerves of our body or the faculties of our mind be extracted from the complex being man, and analysed and described without reference to the rest of his system. Those who take pains to follow the analogy of Scriptural reasoning, must be struck to find how invariably its doctrines and precepts are limited, and qualified by other statements that appear at first sight almost contradictory of them. "Nature abhors a vacuum," and the Bible abhors naked truths; it recoils from dissecting on the surgical table the complex body of God's revelation, and docketing a bone here and a sinew there. It is only in man's imagination that this absolute separation of truths takes place; it is nowhere in God's Book. The analogue of this we find in the realm of metaphysics. There, doctors have defined the faculties of the mind, and

labelled one the memory, another the imagination, another the will, another the reason, another the conscience, and so forth; but we know very well that these definitions are merely aids towards describing the action of that complex organ, the mind; they do not specify separate compartments, each independent of the other; these faculties overlap and intertwine with each other in a way that defies analysis. Though obliged to use the above nomenclature for want of a better, he would be a poor philosopher who would let it control his conceptions of mental phenomena; and so he is a poor divine who lets the phrases of theology limit and determine his conceptions of the truth of God.

In Scripture we find that "justification" and "sanctification" not unfrequently run into each other. The "final perseverance of saints" is qualified by many warnings, such as, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Paul, though rejoicing in one place that "nothing could separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," tells us in another, that he keeps under the body, and brings it into subjection, "lest that

by any means when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway." Nothing is more remarkable in Scripture than the various moods in which the writers speak of their experience. Thus Paul in one place says, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me," and in another, "So then the good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not that I do." Again we find him describing himself as "the chief of sinners," one who had been "a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious," and arguing from his having found mercy that none need despair. In another place, he says of his past life, that "he had lived in all good conscience before God until this day;" also that he had "obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief." Instances of this kind might be multiplied indefinitely. The Christian life abounds in sunshine and shade, its experience varies like an April day, and the glimpses it has of the heavens beyond cannot be described in any uniform way, or even be made to appear in all cases logically consistent.

It may be truly affirmed that the varieties of doctrine that divide the great Protestant Churches

are all more or less reflected in the Bible, and the chief cause of difference lies in giving especial prominence to some fundamental truths, and, for the sake of supposed logical consistency, throwing other complementary truths into the shade. Let us illustrate this by referring to those great types of Christian thought known as the Calvinistic and Arminian. The former builds its system upon the purposes or decrees of God; it takes its stand at the beginning of time, and casts the horoscope of the universe from the throne of Deity. All events therefore follow by a chain of inevitable necessity, and God's dealings with man are expounded on a plan severely simple and logical. It follows from this system that the agency of man is reduced to a minimum, and, indeed, it is only by some sacrifice of logic that his free will is genuinely affirmed; but the tendency of the system is towards fatalism, and, unless cautiously expounded, tends to antinomianism. The Arminian, on the other hand, takes his stand upon man's free will and responsibility, and gives paramount weight to his fulfilling his obligations towards God; he dislikes the doctrine of predestination, and delights in those

texts of Scripture, and they are many, which set forth the love of God towards all mankind, and the salvation that is in Christ for all sinners. The hyper-Calvinist of the old school is so engrossed with the Divine decrees that he makes God virtually the author of man's ruin. He teaches that God created the major portion of the human race for the express purpose of condemning them, and in accordance with this view we find such a writer as Haldane explaining the verse, "And he (Christ) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the *whole world*," to mean that He died only for believers!

It is extraordinary, when men embrace a system, how it leads them unconsciously to twist and explain away all that does not agree with it: the great rock on which theologians have struck is that of *system-making*. They have thought it needful to map out the whole territory of Divine truth with the preciseness of a geometrician; and as the Bible, of all books, is least susceptible of such treatment, it has been handled with an unfairness not known in any other field of thought. At the time the "Shorter Catechism" and its great original,

the "Confession of Faith," were compiled, this habit of reducing Scriptural truth to an exact system was in the fashion; the Bible was thought to contain exact propositions on all possible questions: it was believed that its teaching could be reduced to absolute formulas containing the exact mind of God on all manner of subjects, and that any deviation from these was sinful error. Furthermore, the philosophy of the human mind was then in its infancy; the same pernicious habit of reducing everything to system prevailed in the province of mental science as well as of theology; the one error reacted on the other, and so false metaphysics cramped the free development of theology. So long as these views of Divine truth prevailed, fierce divisions among Christians were inevitable; each school held that it had the whole truth of God, and that all others were heretics; and hence it ensued that, in the days of the Commonwealth, Churchmen, Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists all hated each other, and fought with a desperation which seems to us, now-a-days, incomprehensible.

It was the vicious habit of thinking that all

Divine truth could be expressed in formularies that was the main cause of the strife; there was no place left for essentials and non-essentials; for, if it was believed that God had revealed His mind explicitly on all manner of subjects, then obedience to it was incumbent in things little as well as great. It would be curious to trace this extreme or ultramontane view (for there are Protestant ultramontanes as well as Catholic) in the history of separate articles of faith. For instance, the favourite doctrine of the Church of England in the time of the Stuarts was that kings derived their authority direct from God, and that absolute obedience was due to them from their subjects under all conceivable circumstances. No excess of tyranny could justify a nation in deposing its monarch, and no change of dynasty could absolve from hereditary allegiance. This view was based upon those passages in the 13th chapter of Romans, where St. Paul insists upon unqualified obedience to magistrates; but it was forgotten that the Apostles were themselves the first to disobey magistrates, when their commands conflicted with a higher allegiance. It is strange now to look

back two hundred years and perceive how entirely Christian thought has shifted its point of view in regard to this doctrine.

A still more striking illustration might be drawn from the Protestant teaching about "good works," in connection with man's justification. The Church of Rome had so darkened the glorious doctrines of faith that they were practically hidden from view; God's favour could only be purchased by penance and priestly absolution. The good works commended in Scripture were superseded by empty ceremonies, that had as little to do with personal godliness as the hypocritical observances of the Pharisees of old. When the doctrines of faith were reaffirmed by Luther, there was a complete revulsion of feeling; the discovery was so glorious that for a while nothing but faith was preached by the Reformers, and it became the fashion to underrate the moral and preceptive teaching of the Bible. Luther himself used language that certainly tended to encourage antinomianism, and for a time he doubted the authority of the Epistle of James on account of its supposed legalism. It became a habit with some of the Reformers to teach justifi-

cation by faith so exclusively that no proper sphere was allowed for good works at all. In later times the ultra-Calvinistic writers carried these views to such extremes, that it was counted legal teaching to insist upon the moral duties inculcated so copiously in Scripture. Faith, and faith alone, was to be the spring of all goodness. The believer was dead to the law, alike in its precepts and its penalty; for Christ had fulfilled all for him; and as he was complete in his imputed righteousness, he could not either gain or lose a tittle of the Divine favour from the character of his life here. This teaching, which is not uncommon even yet among Calvinistic divines, seems to give little incitement to a life of holy self-denial. It will not allow that God's favour is influenced in any way by the obedience of the Christian; from the moment of his conversion he is viewed by God only as clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and therefore without spot or blemish; and his possession of eternal life is as assured as if he were already in heaven. There have been times in the history of the Reformed Church when views like these were in the ascendant, and the complementary doctrines with which

Scripture abounds were denounced as heretical. Then the pendulum has swung round, and the Arminian side has come uppermost. The two phases of teaching were strikingly contrasted in the time of Wesley. That eminent apostle of practical godliness laid great weight upon the moral precepts of Scripture, and insisted upon personal sanctification as a binding duty on Christians. He held that the life of a believer from day to day was pleasing or displeasing to God according as he walked before Him with a perfect heart or not. He taught that David was in truth provoking God when guilty of murder and adultery just as much as an unconverted heathen—nay more, for he sinned against greater light, and that had he died in this impenitent state he would have been lost. He held further, that our reward hereafter would vary as we are faithful stewards here, and that the diligent servant would receive a fuller recompense than the idle or slothful one. For this he was violently assailed by some of the Calvinistic divines; he was denounced as teaching Popish errors; and the venerable Toplady went so far as to rise from his death-bed in order to denounce at

the altar the deadly errors of the Methodist leader. It mattered not to these dogmatists that Wesley was effecting the greatest religious revival ever known in England, that he was the blessed instrument of turning tens of thousands of ungodly men into saints, and that he laboured with a zeal scarcely paralleled since the time of Paul. They had espoused a set of high doctrines logically inconsistent with the teaching of Wesley, and they could not or would not see that the armoury of Scripture furnished him with at least as good weapons as they possessed themselves.

The fact is, these two phases of doctrine lie side by side in Scripture; and to the end of time there will be zealous and conscientious upholders of each. Whether one or other will lay strongest hold on each individual believer will depend very much upon his cast of mind and the peculiar circumstances under which he is brought to feel the power of religion; and we will say further, that we do not believe any system of theology can explicitly harmonise them, or reduce to a consistent logical shape the various utterances of Scripture to which they severally appeal. The

high Calvinist will delight in describing all man's righteousness as "filthy rags," all our holiest actions as polluted by sin, and not fit to be presented to God till perfumed by the incense of Christ's sacrifice; while the Arminian will insist that the humble obedience rendered by a believer to God is in itself pleasing to the Most High, "an odour of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God;" and he will hold up as one of the chief motives to a life of self-denial, that not even "a cup of cold water given in the name of Christ shall lose its reward."

The conclusion we wish to draw is this, that the truth of God is many-sided, and cannot be compressed into the rigid moulds of human logic: it evades all exact classification, and transcends all formulas that ever have been or can be devised. Many minds are constitutionally narrow, and cannot take in more than one side of a question; when these once receive a rigid theological system they hold to it through life; they cannot or will not see the qualifying statements with which Scripture abounds; all their force is expended on propping up their own views, and they become

unconsciously sophistical in dealing with rival truths. There are other minds, however, that cannot rest in narrow dogmatism; they see subtle links of connection between one truth and another, between one system and another; they feel that human definitions are imperfect expositions of Divine mysteries, that human language itself is a feeble instrument to express thoughts that deal with the infinite, and that our best systems are approximations to, rather than complete embodiments of, Divine truth. When this view takes possession of the mind, it wonderfully smooths away the verbal difficulties of Biblical criticism; it is not staggered because a statement in Romans will not exactly square with a statement in James; it does not seek forced and unnatural modes of reconciliation—modes so opposed to common sense that they only supply fuel to infidelity; but it recognises the fact that in the region of spiritual ideas the best way of conveying a complex truth to the mind is often by stating the two extremes. Any one can see the application of this principle in the case of common proverbs. The function of a proverb is to lodge a useful

maxim in the memory by means of a pithy expression; and we venture to say that there is hardly a proverb which has not its counterpart, and between the two there is often a verbal contradiction. Thus Solomon exhorts us "not to answer a fool according to his folly, lest we be like unto him," and then in the next verse, to "answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit;" each precept has its proper application in practical life, and many of the sayings of Paul, and even of our Lord Himself, have this same antithetical, we might almost say paradoxical, character. Nothing would be easier than to fill a volume with parallel quotations from Scripture which appear on the surface to contradict each other; and the man who is taught to believe that all Scripture can be harmonised by mere verbal logic, will fall an easy prey to the infidel.

This leads us to observe further, that the method so common in some places, of requiring children to prove difficult doctrines by Scripture texts, is very unsatisfactory, and much calculated to produce this strained and puerile way of interpreting the Sacred Book. The child is apt to think that

if he can find anywhere between the boards of the Bible a sentence which appears on the surface to teach the doctrine to be proved, he has established the point: it may be the context shows that it has a totally different application; but this is often lost sight of, and the vicious habit is formed of handling the holy volume, with all its glowing imagery, as if it were a counterpart of "Poor Richard's Almanack." Of course, we know that many teachers are too wise to allow children to fall into this snare; but when a system of inculcating dry Scripture proofs prevails generally, it is impossible to prevent much mischief being done by the unintelligent way in which they are sometimes taught. We are often reminded of the Athenian wit, who took round a brick as a specimen of the house he had to sell, when we see children tearing from the living body of Scripture a detached sentence, and employing it in a sense the opposite of that which the inspired writer intended.

To those who have spent all their life in the same atmosphere of religious thought, it is difficult to explain the weakness of building up a system on isolated texts of Scripture. They do not know how readily the same weapon is used by all sects

alike, and how easy it is for any who come near to orthodoxy at all, to quote detached sayings by the thousand in support of their peculiar views. We have often thought that in no branch of learning has such a weak and defective logic been employed as in defending theological systems, in none has mere verbal quibbling been allowed such scope, and in none have legitimate inferences been pushed to such extravagant lengths.

What conclusion, then, are we to draw from all this in respect of teaching children? Are we to infer that religious truth is beyond their comprehension, and that it is a matter of indifference whether they are rightly instructed or not? Nay, verily: we esteem the religious education of the young as beyond all price; and it is just because we wish it to be vital and lasting that we have criticised so freely the old inadequate methods. We would say, in the first place, Teach copiously the historical facts of Scripture. There is an immense field for the teacher there; there is provision enough for some years in the animated narratives of the Old Testament, and the life and doings of our Lord, as recorded in the Gospels. The human mind is formed to draw inferences;

and it will draw most valuable ones from this groundwork of fact, even if left to itself. It is beyond all price to get firmly rooted in the mind of a child even such elementary lessons as that God is angry with sin, that He will surely punish it, that He loves the pure in heart, that He delights in mercy, and wishes to be gracious; if the child is allowed slowly to evolve these truths from the pictorial histories of the Bible, it will have made good use of its early years, and the impression will be far more abiding and influential than if it came in the way of abstract didactic teaching. Nor is it well to be always "drawing the moral" from Scripture narratives; it is often better to let the materials arrange themselves gradually in the human mind; and the moral will be drawn in due season, when the mind is ripe for it. Christ constantly spoke parables whose moral was not obvious to His hearers; He knew it was better they should ponder on the matter awhile before the key of explanation was furnished; and we should be content to sow the seeds of Divine truth in the same way, and not try to produce flowers and fruit till the root has taken hold of the earth. The human mind is furnished with a delicate me-

chanism for assimilating truth; it takes pleasure in the use of this mechanism, and should be aided, not superseded, in the use of it. The wise teacher will guide it, and put materials before it, which will lead it spontaneously, almost involuntarily, to the conclusions he aims at; but if he thrusts these conclusions upon it before its intellectual machinery has had time to evolve them, he causes a listless, dejected feeling; and the truths so conveyed lie crude and undigested in the mind. How often have we seen children—though this applies more to the past than the present—repeating their Catechism with a jaded and meaningless look, as if to say that the process was one their understanding and conscience had no part in! We are aware, however, that more enlightened ideas are now gaining ground, and we are drawing on early recollections for some of the pictures we have sketched. Perhaps we may be charged with ignoring the march of progress, and dwelling too much on past abuses; but we know that such abuses are far from extirpated yet; there are places where they survive in rank luxuriance, and it is for them and those who uphold them that our remarks are mainly designed.

But, say many excellent people, Never mind

whether children can understand formulas or not, never mind whether they can see the force of the Scripture texts by which they are supported; the great thing is to lodge "a form of sound words" in the memory, and at a later period it will fructify. The memory is plastic when young, and advantage should be taken of that to store it with wholesome knowledge. This view carries great weight with many; and we allow that it is not without a measure of reason: certainly the memory should be stored in youth with such knowledge as will edify in after life. But we would say, in accordance with the whole scope of our doctrine, Store it well with suitable portions of Scripture; let the child commit to memory the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the Prodigal Son, the story of Lazarus, and the like. Then would the precious seed be embalmed in living forms, and from the earliest years the exercise of the memory could be carried on in unison with the motions of the inner life. Nothing can be more valuable to a child than treasures of Scriptural knowledge; but they must be taught in a childlike manner, and as little as possible in the nature of task-work. If the memory is incurably defective, be content to lodge in the un-

derstanding the main outlines of the Scripture narratives, and above all let "the man Christ Jesus" walk before the eye of the child as a real living person. When He is approached (as in the Shorter Catechism), first, as the second person of the Trinity, next as "the only Redeemer of God's elect, who being the eternal Son of God became man, and so was and continueth to be both God and man in two distinct natures in one person for ever," the child only thinks of Him as an unintelligible abstraction. It is as if the first account a little child got of the sun was, that "it was a luminous, incandescent body, the centre of the solar system!"

How inveterate is the custom which makes man mistake *words* for *ideas;* how slow and difficult a process to teach him that words are but signs or symbols, and that they only serve as a common medium of thought when they stand for signs of the same thing! The great majority of people will argue endlessly about words, without ever inquiring whether their opponent attaches the same meaning to them as they do themselves; the two things are inextricably interwoven together, and the major portion of the disputes that divide mankind arise from their talking different languages when they

think they are speaking the same. This is peculiarly true of theology; and, were it generally recognised, there would be less anxiety to teach hard formulas, and more to see that the actual thing they signify is lodged in the mind. Amazing is the tendency in religious teaching to harden into theological forms, and lose its sap and vitality; stereotyped phrases come to be repeated by rote, and lose almost all their meaning. Preaching and teaching have a strong tendency to settle into narrow conventional grooves. The indolence and intolerance native to the human mind conspire to produce this result. We would all rather settle on our lees than be emptied from vessel to vessel; and so the controversies that arise in the religious world are far from being unmixed sources of evil: they shake slumberous consciences out of their self-complacent torpor, and oblige people to dig deep for a reason of the hope that is in them. Religious controversy, were it conducted in a loving and charitable spirit, might be a great means of enlarging the horizon of our spiritual vision; but, unhappily, it is seldom carried on without an acrimony that must often astonish men of the world. One indirect advantage may perhaps accrue to the Church from the activity of modern

rationalism; it will tend to withdraw theologians from the dusty cobwebs of sectarian controversy, and force them to unite for the defence of the vital interests of the faith. The great solid grounds on which we rest belief in our religion will have to be brought forth more prominently, and advocated in a way more acceptable to reasonable men. The petty differences among sects, and their puerile ways of appealing to fragments of Scripture, will have to be put aside, that we may meet the common enemy on his own ground. We have no doubt that the spread of rationalism has softened the sharp edges of theology, and caused a virtual withdrawal from many untenable positions. As in a war with a foreign enemy home factions cease, so in a struggle for the great verities of our faith, the various sects find out how easily they can fight under a common flag.

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